



# 法神降临

游戏

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# **Advent of the Archmage**

– Descent of the God of Magic –

**- Volume 4 -**

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*by Mo Xiang*

# Advent of the Archmage



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# Chapter 186

## Only Stones Were Left

A loud rumble startled a flock of seagulls casually relaxing on a cliff. On the coast, the crashing waves created a tall water pillar that sprayed water in all directions. Under the shining rays of the sun, a faint rainbow could be momentarily seen.

A few figures with stark differences in height stood on the cliff.

The tall people consisted of Link and the captain of the Flamingo Band of Mercenaries, Jacker. The shorter people were the Yabba race. The leader of the three-man team was called Aberdeen, the supervisor of the waterway development project. The two people standing by his side were his assistants.

This place was located on the East Coast of the Ferde Wilderness called the Tigers Cliff. It was an extremely tall cliff with a concave area 900 feet wide and 90 feet deep in the middle. The slope after the concave area was gentle, making it easy to walk onto the coast from this area.

If this cliff did not exist on this coast, it would have made an extremely good spot to build a port.

In order to develop his territory, Link would require a lot of resources. The most economical and efficient way to do this was through the sea. Therefore, once Link had a basic understanding of the situation, the first thing he did was request the Yabba engineering team to open the seaway.

Staring at the crashing waves, Link asked, "How long will it take to build a usable waterway?"

Previously, all these matters were left in the hands of the Flamingo Band of Mercenaries. Link merely gave some general instructions through letters and did not have a clear picture in his mind. Now that he was personally involved, he would have to inquire the experts and make sure that the project was done to his standards.

Aberdeen knew that the young man in front of him was a gold mine and a powerful

Magician. He would not be able to deceive him. Aberdeen then adopted a serious tone and said, "We have already sent divers to explore the area. The whole area within 50 nautical miles from here is filled with reefs. However, only the ones within a 2.5-mile radius from the Tiger Cliff have to be removed. In order to clear up this area, the estimated time will be two months. We have already started, and it will be done in a months' time."

A month sounded good.

Link then pressed on, "Do we need to mark a safe sailing route for the area outside of the 2.5-mile radius then?"

Aberdeen patiently explained, "There is no need to. Nowadays, every ship is enchanted with some basic water elemental magic runes. An experienced captain would be able to judge the depth of the water in front of them from the change in the brightness of the runes. As long as the reefs are not too densely populated, they'll be able to avoid them with ease."

Upon hearing these words, Link immediately knew that he had complicated the situation in his mind. In the real world, people would often look for the most economical and reliable ways to solve problems. Furthermore, he was a complete novice at sea trade. If he probed too much into the methods of the experts, he might unknowingly make a joke out of himself.

"So what would be the estimated cost?" Link asked. This was something he had to keep track of.

"4827 gold coins. This is an extremely accurate cost. The Yabba race has always been fair in our pricing, especially to our good friends." Aberdeen patted his chest and quoted an extremely specific number.

Link, on the other hand, had his own ideas. "I would like the harbor to have enough room for expansion as well. If we manage to do well in the future, we would then be able to develop it without much hassle."

Aberdeen then had an embarrassed expression on his face. "Sir, if that is the case, we will have to level all the stones under our feet. The workload would immediately double..."

"My budget is 10000 gold coins," Link said as he stuck out one finger with confidence.

"Consider it done." Aberdeen's eyes immediately glowed as he spoke.

He then turned around and started discussing with his two assistants. His assistants held a blueprint each in their hands, and after a moment of whispering and flailing of arms, Aberdeen said, "Sir, that would increase the time required by another half a month."

The addition of work naturally meant that more time was needed. Link nodded without question. The group then walked back along the Tiger Cliff before they went their separate ways. Link then followed Jacker all the way back to the camp on a horse.

Jacker looked like he wanted to say something on the way.

Link noticed it immediately and understood his concerns. He laughed, "Jacker, are you afraid that we will not have enough gold coins?"

This was exactly what Jacker wanted to say. He turned around and looked at the port which was under construction. "Sir, including the money you spent on the port, the total cost for the development of the Ferde Wilderness has already amounted to 30000 gold coins, and this is only the beginning."

Not long ago, they had just cleared all the bandits out of the area and built a small camp for themselves. In the blink of an eye, 30000 gold coins were spent. The speed at which they were depleting their resources was simply insane!

Jacker had never seen such extravagant spending before. Apart from him, Lucy and Gildern were also horrified, and even Magician Carrido also started having doubts. While Link could indeed earn money with his enchanting skills, it was not enough to keep up with their spending.

They were afraid that Link would deplete all their resources before the Ferde Wilderness could even take flight.

Link laughed, "This is a necessary investment. If we save now, we will only spend more next time."

Jacker's lips seemed to move ever so slightly. He was usually a straightforward person, however, some things were really difficult for him to put into words.

Link laughed loudly and teased, "It has only been a few months since I last saw you.

What happened?"

Jacker smiled bitterly and decided to confide in Link with a worried expression on his face, "My lord, the Ferde Wilderness is really barren. No place in this area can be used to grow crops. There is also gravel and stones everywhere. Apart from a few weeds, there are no trees and rivers in sight. It is also often a victim of hurricanes, and this barren land provides absolutely no shelter. Can such a place really prosper?"

They originally arrived at the Ferde Wilderness with confidence and passion to develop this land together with Link. However, that was when they were unfamiliar with the situation. In these few months, their enthusiasm had been completely devastated by this desolate land. Food, clothing and even wood had to be transported from other areas. There was no helping this barren hellhole.

Link merely laughed without a hint of worry.

The natural environment of the Ferde Wilderness was indeed lacking. However, if that were not the case, he would never have gotten such a huge piece of land.

Furthermore, the Ferde Wilderness had its benefits as well. Apart from the anti-magic soil, it had an extremely strategic geographical position. It faced the sea and Dawn Island, the home of the High Elves. It had relatively easy access to the southern countries and was close to the capital of the Norton Kingdom in the North. These were acceptable conditions.

As for the natural environment, he simply had to change it.

That would totally be possible in the World of Firuman. As long as one was willing to part with their gold coins, anything was possible. Link currently had 120000 gold coins in his bag. Part of this fortune was earned from his enchanting skills, while 80000 gold coins was the reward from the Magic Academy in the name of helping him develop his territory.

"Relax, Jacker. In ten years, the Ferde Wilderness will definitely turn into a bustling Ferde City," Link assured.

At that moment, the camp came into sight. Link whipped the horse harshly, signaling it to accelerate towards the camp. Jacker, on the other hand, still saw no hope in the territory. He simply sighed and followed closely behind Link.



The camp was called the Scorched Ridge. Although it was merely a temporary camp, Link still had to spend nearly 6000 gold coins for its construction.

The camp was built on high ground and was enclosed by a circle of tall castle walls built from boulders. There were a total of two gates in the castle wall, one of which led to the sea, while the other opened to the Girvent Forest.

The castle wall encircled an area almost 900 feet in radius. A watchtower was also built at the highest point to survey the surrounding area. Below the watchtower were the wooden huts where the mercenary band and workers lived in.

Link alighted the horse and handed the reins over to the soldier on one side before walking towards a large wooden building.

This wooden building was the administrative building of the camp. It had two stories and covered more than 600 square feet. Link could see working personnel hurriedly entering and leaving the building. As Link approached the building, a studious-looking young man immediately came to welcome him. He was Link's extremely competent secretary called Joshua. Link had hired him from River Cove Town.

He held a piece of document in his hand and reported clearly to Link, "My lord, the academy has given their reply. This is a handwritten letter from Anthony."

'Read it to me," Link said.

"Yes," Joshua nodded and continued. "The letter mentioned that your vision is not practical. It is impossible to change the natural environment of the Ferde Wilderness simply by using one Mage Tower. In order to achieve this goal, you need a magic formation formed by at least five powerful Mage Towers with a Master Magician stationed in each one of them. This, similarly, would not be achievable in the near future... the academy can offer to build a Mage Tower for you at half the price, but will be unable to satisfy your request."

It was indeed not practical. One Mage Tower would cost at least 100000 gold coins to build. Five Mage Towers would then add up to 500000 gold coins. Furthermore, it required a Master Magician to be stationed in every one of those Mage Towers. This plan was insane.

Link walked along while Joshua read the letter out to him. When he reached his study room, he had fully understood the message and sat down with a frown on his face.



"That is not good news."

In order to develop the Ferde Wilderness, the port was a key component. However, the other key component was to change the climate. These were indispensable parts of Link's plan. The Ferde Wilderness was, on average, hit by four mega-hurricanes and ten smaller hurricanes every year. If this was not changed, it would be impossible for this place to flourish.

A Mage Tower was also an important component in Link's personal growth. Although he had graduated from the academy, there was no limit to magic research. If he wanted to further his strength, he needed a Mage Tower of his own, preferably one similar to the scale of the pivotal Mage Towers in the academy.

Now that the academy was unable to help him, Link had to find an alternative.

The young secretary then brought out another letter. This letter had a magical imprint on it, suggesting that it was a secret letter. Joshua handed this letter to Link and said, "My lord, this letter just arrived."

Link cast a glance and realized that the letter had a magic imprint that glowed ever so slightly. The envelope was made from tough bear leather. There was even a self-destruct rune at the back of the envelope. As long as the letter was opened in the wrong way, it would explode. But what was the correct way to open this letter? There were no explanations or instructions.

Link carefully observed the letter and decoded the meaning and position of each rune. After half a minute, he had broken the code. It was a Malfoy style lock that was intricately designed. However, as long as one was familiar with the conditions, they could easily decode it.

A few months ago, Link might have been stumped by this code. However, after reading through the notes given to him by all the Master Magicians in the academy, his magic foundation had reached a new level. This magic rune lock was a piece of cake for him.

After five or six minutes, Link tapped his fingers lightly on the runes and imbued them with different amounts of mana. After tapping the thirteenth rune, all the magic runes instantly disappeared, and the letter automatically opened.

Before he pulled out the letter, Link could not help but wonder, who is playing charades with me? This is pretty interesting.

# Chapter 187

## The Thousand-Year-Old Lich

Link took out the letter and examined the crude map drawn on it. At a glance Link realized that he was very familiar with all the landmarks in it. After closer inspection, it turned out that the map was of the area around Scorched Ridge.

There was a red line on the map that extended southeast from the Scorched Ridge and ended at a place called Shark Bay, where on the map a line of words was written.

I can help you transform the climate in the Ferde Wilderness, but you must come alone. Are you brave enough?

Link couldn't help but smile cynically as he read those words.

Hmmm... Is this a trick to trap me or is it someone who can't be seen? Link wondered.

The person who'd sent him this map had used an intricate Malfoy runic lock, which meant that the sender was a Magician and judging by the quality of the runes and the level of the spell used, probably a Level-5 or higher Magician at that.

Such a Magician wouldn't waste his time pulling a prank on Link.

Besides, Shark Bay wasn't that far from Scorched Ridge anyway, only about 5 miles on the road, so Link decided he would go there and see what was up.

There was a possibility that he might encounter some dangers there, of course. But he had mastered the spell Dimensional Jump and still had two more chances to use the power of the Prophetic White Stone, he even had 200 Omni Points now, so even if someone had set up a trap and ambushed him, he was confident that no one in this world could kill him easily.

Another possibility was finding someone who really could transform the climate of Ferde Wilderness. Achieving that would mean that a huge chunk of problem Link was facing now would be solved!

With this in mind, Link thought there really was no reason for him not to go and find this mysterious person at all.

It was midday at the time, and the weather was pleasant. Link greeted his clerk Joshua then promptly left the campgrounds alone.

Once he was outside the camp, Link summoned the Fenrir Wolf and almost flew straight to Shark Bay. With the speed of the Fenrir Wolf, he covered the distance of five miles in only about six minutes.

As he approached Shark Bay, a cliff emerged into view. Link hopped down from the Fenrir Wolf and ran up to it. He discovered a ring-shaped beach around the cliff, but there was no one there save for a few seagulls.

Link walked along the cliff but still couldn't find anyone there. Just as he was starting to get suspicious, he sensed a Mana fluctuation. He quickly turned around and noticed an almost transparent figure emerging from a crack in the cliff stone.

Link understood why this mysterious figure had wanted him to come alone the moment he saw him. Had any normal folk caught a glimpse of this figure, they would've been frightened to death by the figure's appearance.

This figure was a Lich, a pure Lich, whose body was now completely skeletons without an ounce of flesh on it. The bones looked strangely beautiful, though, just like jade stones. In his eye sockets, there were bluish flames from which extraordinary spiritual energy and Mana emanated. From this Link could gauge that he must be at least at Level-7 and was as strong and powerful as Anthony, the dean of the East Cove Academy.

This strength wasn't enough to intimidate Link, of course. He calmly canceled the Wind Fenrir and walked towards the Lich.

"May I know your name?" asked Link when he was about thirty feet away from the Lich.

Liches were creatures of darkness, most of them were evil in nature and regarded other lives as their own playthings. Still, Link sensed something special from this Lich. The dark energy he sensed from him was, in fact, pure and serene, just like the tranquility of midnight, and there was not a hint of evil in him at all, completely unlike the aura he sensed from the Necromancer Shade and Bale who had transformed into a Lich

previously. Hence, Link decided to stay his hand and approached the Lich.

"I'm Vance," answered the Lich.

"Huh?" Link thought he had heard of the name somewhere before. He tried to recall it carefully; then something jumped out in his memory. "Are you the person who founded the studies of Battle Aura?"

Was that possible? According to the historical record, the Lich would have to be about a thousand years old to be the founder of Battle Aura studies! Yet this Lich was only a Level-7 Magician, so how could it be possible for him to live so long?

Even Legendary-level figures couldn't live this long. The king of underground organization Morpheus himself was less than 500 years old, and he was always making sacrifices to the demon god. Why? Because he knew that he would soon expire!

To Link's surprise, Vance nodded.

"I didn't expect you to know me," said the Lich. "What an honor. You must be wondering how I manage to live this long. I'm afraid I can't explain it to you in detail right here, and now, all I can say is that I made a deal with a demon god in the Sea of Void after committing a deplorable sin and was locked up inside the Azura Tower for the last 400 years.

Demon god was the collective name of low-level gods of darkness, they were usually low-level Demi-Gods, and there were hordes and hordes of them. There were at least a hundred different real names of these demon gods that were known in the dark corners of Firuman. As long as one knew one real name of these demon gods one could summon them through a special ritual and make a deal with them.

These deals were usually sinister and bloody in nature, which meant that Vance's past wasn't as clean as his calm aura might suggest.

This was no surprise to Link, though. History had recorded how Vance had tried to study Battle Art and Battle Aura by conducting horrific experiments on live Warriors. He might have been the founder of Battle Art studies, but that didn't necessarily mean that the method he used to achieve it was acceptable. According to legends he mysteriously disappeared without a trace in the end. Now Link knew that he had actually made a deal with a demon god and transformed into a Lich.



To put it simply, Vance was a mad genius who had committed some questionable deeds but wasn't purely evil in nature.

Link didn't mind such a figure, although he was still hesitant to associate himself with him. Still, the Lich had promised to help solve an urgent problem for him in the letter, and he didn't want to turn him down before at least getting to know him first. After a few seconds of silent contemplation, Link decided not to waste any time beating around the bush here.

"Did you say you can solve the climate problem for me?" Link asked.

Vance chuckled in a hoarse voice when he heard Link.

"I met an interesting young woman in Girvent Forest after escaping from the Azura Tower," said Vance. "She told me that you are an open-minded young mind who wouldn't turn me out the moment you see me, that's why I decided to come here. Apparently, she was right about you."

"Is that woman called Eleanor?" Link asked. He was considerably alarmed by this revelation. "You didn't hurt her, did you?" Eleanor had been a good friend to him and had helped him a great deal many times before. Link didn't want any harm to ever come to her.

Vance shook his head in reply.

"Am I such an evil person in your eyes?" he asked Link. "No, you've misjudged me. All I ever desired was to learn the truth. Yes, I may have used barbaric techniques to achieve my goals, but wasn't it all worth it in the end?"

Link was relieved to hear that Eleanor was fine. That was all that mattered to him. He didn't care to trouble himself with this old Lich's past mistakes.

"What do I have to do in return for your help?" Link asked.

"You are a smart one indeed," said Vance with a laugh. "That made it so much easier. Well, to begin with, I've just regained my freedom not too long ago, so I don't have any wand with me at all. Neither do I have access to any materials to create one..."

It seemed the Lich had seen one of Link's magic gear and realized that this was one of his fortes.

"That won't be a problem," said Link. "I'll create one for you as soon as possible, and I promise you it will be just as good as my own." Creating wand wasn't that big a deal for Link anyway.

"And then," the Lich continued, "I must first reclaim my underground palace, but that is not something I could ever achieve alone. I need some help."

"Your underground palace?" asked Link suspiciously. "What happened to it?" Link was beginning to think that the Lich was demanding too much out of him.

"I had been imprisoned for 400 years. At first, I thought the world outside was too noisy and complicated, so I decided to just stay inside the Azura Tower forever. But since I'm out now, I have no choice but to find a place to go. I had once built an underground palace, so I made up my mind to go back there. I discovered, however, that it had been taken over by a group of Necromancers. Their leader is a terrifying Level-6 swordsman Necromancer, and all his underlings are tough as they had mastered the Battle Art that I had developed a long time ago. This Necromancer swordsman even had the control of the magic seal in my underground palace. In short, I could never defeat them alone."

"But a wand is already worth 20,000 gold coins," said Link plainly. "And you still want me to help you reclaim your underground palace. Don't you think you're asking too much of me?"

Link had achieved some reputation for himself by now. He was sure that even without this Lich's help he would be able to find another way to solve the climate problem anyway. He could go to the Isle of Dawn, for example, and find help there. The High Elves were renowned for being powerful Magicians, after all, so Link was sure that he would find someone there who could help him.

Vance chuckled and rubbed his bony palms together, making a clunk noise as he did so.

"I may have asked too much," said the Lich, "but once my underground palace is reclaimed, there would be rewards for you. There weren't many gold coins there, but there are many magical materials and seven types of Epic-level Battle Art scrolls. I've been storing them there for all these years, yet I have no use for them, so if you want, you may choose any of the Battle Art scrolls that you like, or you could just take them all. As for the magical materials, we can divide them equally between us! By the way,

this solution I have for your climate problem is in a book I kept in my underground palace, so I must go back there to get it."

As he heard this, Link's interest was suddenly piqued. Vance was the founder of Battle Art studies after all, so there was a high chance that he was telling the truth. The seven Epic-level Battle Art scrolls would be of little value to a thousand-year-old Lich like Vance, but to Link, these items would have inestimable value in helping him develop the strength of his troop!

"If what you said is true," said Link after having weighed the matter for a while, "then we couldn't possibly defeat them alone. I must find another helper.

An underground palace would be nothing like the outside world. The terrain and interior would be complex and labyrinthine which would hamper his ability to fully exert his magic power. Furthermore, the opponent would be a skilled swordsman who was familiar with the terrain and had developed considerable strength while being backed up by numerous tough underlings. This wouldn't be an easy battle to win.

The best helper, in this case, would be a strong fighter who wouldn't be disturbed by the presence of the ghoulish Lich and smart enough to think on his feet.

After much deliberation, Link thought the best person he could find to help them here was Celine, the demon princess. Not only was she a mighty Magician, but she was also experienced in martial skills which would come in handy.

"I don't have any problem with that," said Vance. "But how long would you need to find this helper?"

"I'm not quite sure," answered Link. "She's in the south at the moment, but I'll try to summon her. If I get no response, then I might need to go down there and find her myself. My estimate would be about a month."

"That's fine," said the Lich. "I wish you luck in finding her. Oh, by the way, do you happen to have any spare wand that I could use while I'm waiting for the new one?" Vance stretched out a hand towards Link as he spoke.

Link did have a spare wand, although it was far inferior to the main wand that he's currently using. He had created this crude wand with spare Mithril just to practice his craft, but since Vance seemed to need a wand so urgently, he took it out from his storage pendant and tossed it towards him.

Vance took the wand and tested it with a few simple spells. He seemed to be muttering something under his breath as he cast the spells and the bones of his mouth made a rattling noise as he did so.

"This is the worst wand I've used in over a thousand years," said Vance finally. "But it's better than nothing, I guess."

Link didn't take the Lich's jeering remarks to heart. He then summoned the Wind Fenrir again and turned towards the Lich.

"I'll try summoning her the moment I get back," said Link. "I hope everything goes well."

"Good," said Vance. "I'll be here in Shark Bay for a while. Oh, yes, I've been locked up for so long that I'd forgotten most of the Battle Art techniques. But I do remember one—Imperial Conqueror. It's a fire element, Battle Art. Think of it as a sign of my sincerity."

As he spoke, Vance handed Link a magic scroll.

Link opened the scroll and glanced at it for a while. He thought it was an exceptional spell, albeit with a ridiculous name.

"It's a good spell but isn't the name a bit silly?" said Link.

Vance smiled slyly in reply, and his upper and lower jaw bones clunked and rattled as he did so.

"But those simple-minded Warriors wouldn't learn it if it didn't have a name that sounds impressive!" he said.

Link made no reply and hopped onto the Wind Fenrir's back.

"I will prepare the wand for you as soon as possible," he said. Then he promptly turned the wolf around and sped back to Scorched Ridge.

Link was the only Magician in Scorched Ridge at the moment because Carrido was in River Cove Town and Eliard had gone back to East Cove Magic Academy. Hence, Link wasn't worried about anyone sensing any Mana fluctuation he might cause. Once he reached his own wooden cabin, he took out the black feather Celine had given him and



cast a small fireball to burn the feather.

The feather burned quietly and slowly in a gray flame. It burned continuously for three minutes; then the flame burst into an intense brightness for a slight moment, then it puffed out and was extinguished immediately.

In the meantime, Link could not sense Celine's aura at all. This aroused an unsettling concern in his heart.

Link wasn't a rookie Magician as he used to be. He knew that the burning of the feather was a summoning process that required the receiver to reply to his summoning with their aura. Yet he hadn't sensed a trace of Celine's aura at all just now, and this worried him very much

He remembered the rumors he heard about the appearance of three high-level demons in Leo Kingdom and Link's ever-calm heart was agitated for the very first time.

Had anything bad happened to her? Link wondered. What's going on with that lovesick Wavier, could he do anything to harm Celine? Something's not right. I must go down to the south and find her!

# Chapter 188

## The Chosen Path of Two Genius

Although Link had already made the decision to search for Celine in the South, he could not simply leave his territory. The entire development of the area rested on his decisions. He thus had to make some arrangements before he could leave.

This took him three full days. In this period, he left enough gold coins and made basic arrangements of the development plans for the next three months.

Unfortunately, right after he was done with the preparations, the Ferde Wilderness was hit by a huge hurricane. It was an extremely serious one with rumors of people getting swept off their feet. The sea waves crashed violently against one another, and torrential rain terrorized the land. The territory was even greeted by hail. Everyone stayed in at the Scorched Ridge, shivering in their own homes while praying for the blessing of the gods. They were afraid this hurricane would destroy their fragile wooden houses.

Link disregarded the advice of Lucy and the others and stubbornly set out in the abominable weather. He summoned the Wind Fenrir and started charging southwards. Along the way, images of Celine flashed across his mind. His memories of her in the game and in this reality became intertwined.

Aren't you afraid of me? You know I'm a demon! On the rooftop of the Gladstone City clocktower, Celine teased him while exuding her unparalleled charm.

I can't choose my birthright. However, I can choose the path I want to take! Celine eyes shone with resolve in the game as she said this sentence.

My father? He is merely a piece of crap in the abyss! She frowned whenever she said this.

Oh, Link, you are really an interesting Magician. I think I might have fallen in love with you. Heh, oh my, did you take that seriously?

Fool, I love to see the dazed expressions of you mortals.

The memories flashed through his mind with unusual clarity. Link felt a fire burning in his heart.

"Celine, I'm coming!"

He accelerated, bringing his speed to a maximum.

The wind roared as he sped into the boundless horizon.

A flash suddenly appeared in the sky as a thunderbolt struck the ground. Hailstones were mixed into the raindrops which mercilessly crashed down upon Link. Despite the protection from the Edelweiss spell, Link appeared to be struggling against the forces of nature. Many times, he would fly off the back of the Wind Fenrir as the view of the terrain was terrible.

After each fall, Link would summon a new Wind Fenrir while in mid-air to prevent himself from getting injured. He would then continue charging forward without reducing his speed.

At that moment, Link was no longer the Magician who shook the world with his name. He was also no Duke or Master of a territory. He was merely a young man following his heart.

There were six countries in the South, each of them on a much smaller scale than the Norton Kingdom. The total size of the six kingdoms was merely 1.5 times that of the Norton Kingdom. In order to defend themselves against the Northern Lions, these six countries formed an alliance called the Southern Free Trade Confederation.

Within the six countries, the Kingdom of Leo was ranked the last in terms of general strength and was also the smallest. It merely covered 800000 square kilometers. However, despite its size, the Magician organization located at the southern districts of its capital, Opal City, had made its reputation throughout the entire Firuman continent. This organization was the Southern Magician Alliance.

Unlike the tall Mage Towers that were preferred by people in the North, the Magicians in the South did not find such structures appealing. Instead, they preferred to build majestic castles.

The Southern Magician Alliance's base was essentially built from a huge group of castles. It covered an area of 30000 yards and had six pivotal castles set in a six-star

array formation. The perimeter of the castle was filled with residential homes, where the workers and merchants with connections to the Magician Alliance lived. There were about 5000 of such people, including servants, coachman, horse trainers, scroll merchants and so on. It looked just like a city of magic. This was where the Alliance's youngest genius Magician, Wavier, studied magic.

Wavier was 21 years old and had elegant silver hair and eyes. In three months, he was expected to achieve a breakthrough and reach Level-5. This achievement would be an unprecedented one in the history of the alliance. He had hence earned the right to use the Merlin's Wand.

If all went according to plan, Wavier's road to success had already been set. His strength would continue to rise, probably even reaching Level-8. If he managed to attain that strength, he would then very likely become the next dean of the alliance.

However, an incident two months ago completely messed up the rhythm of his progress.

Wavier woke up as usual in the morning and ate breakfast casually. Following which, he headed straight to the library in the alliance. He had gotten an epiphany regarding multi-cast spells last night and needed to validate them with the wisdom of his predecessors to ensure that they were viable. He walked into the long corridor outside his room; there were many other Magicians who had woken up early. After seeing Wavier, they all bowed respectfully to which Wavier replied in kind. When he reached the Elottison Square right outside the castle, a sentence caught his attention.

"Did you know the investigation team has returned?" This was from a Magician's Apprentice.

"Oh, what's the situation?" Another person asked. Wavier was immediately intrigued and slowed down his pace.

"We sent ten people over, but only three made it back alive! It was said that they found connections between the demons and the Syndicate. That damned group of thieves are covering up the footsteps of the demons."

"The Syndicate is really disgusting!" Another Magic Apprentice was immediately enraged. He waved his fist in the air.

The two apprentices left after this short conversation. On the other hand, Wavier



immediately changed his direction and headed directly to his mentor, Master Hanlott.

Master Hanlott was a Level-6 Magician. However, he was already 60 years old and did not possess as much energy as before; he would only wake up at 9 o'clock every day. Wavier would probably have to wait for a while before he could see him.

Master Hanlott's room was on the first floor. A young female servant was standing in front of the door. Upon seeing Wavier, she spoke respectfully, "Sir, the master is still sleeping. Please wait a moment."

"Alright." Wavier found a seat in the hall and started reading a magic book.

Previously, he could get immersed in a magic book quickly, to the point where he would become oblivious to his surroundings. However, he seemed to be unable to do so today. Two months ago, traces of demons appeared in the capital. He had personally participated in the investigation; one time, he saw a young girl. Despite only getting a glance, he felt as though he was struck by something amazing. The whole world seemed dull when placed beside this beautiful young girl of brilliance and vigor.

After that, he felt as though he was sleepwalking and made many mistakes along the way. Realizing that something was amiss, he voluntarily withdrew from the investigation team. Although the girl was proven to be a demon, it still did not change Wavier's impression of her.

How can such a beautiful young girl be a demon? Although Wavier's eyes were stuck onto the magic book, he was replaying images of that fateful encounter in his mind.

It was at an ordinary market in Opal City. The girl was wearing a light blue linen dress and carrying a hand-woven basket. She was bargaining with a few farmers and looked just like a girl-next-door. There were many of such young girls in Opal City—she was just slightly prettier.

However, Wavier was somehow mesmerized by her the moment their gazes met.

The eyes shining with brilliance, the teasing shape of her nose and the way her crescent brows shot up when she noticed him in a daze—it was as though Cupid had shot an arrow right through his heart.

I wonder where she is now? Is she hurt by any of the Magicians? Did she... kill anyone? Many possibilities flashed through his mind. He felt terrible.

Suddenly, a voice rang in his ear. "Sir? Sir?"

"Oh?" Wavier was jolted out of his thoughts and looked up at the servant.

"The master is awake. You may visit him now."

"Oh, alright," Wavier replied as he put away the magic book that he had barely read. He followed the servant into his master's room.

Hanlott's room was simply decorated. He had never been one that liked extravagance or wasteful designs. Minimalist and a basic lifestyle was something that he had always believed in. His favorite robe was the plain, white robe that he was currently wearing.

The moment he saw his talented disciple, Hanlott smiled. "Sit, my dear lad."

He liked to call the young Magicians that he was close to lads. He admired the youthful vigor that was emanating from them.

Wavier sat on a wooden stool beside the bed and said, "Master, I heard that the investigative team suffered great losses this time around."

Hanlott's face sank upon hearing this news. He nodded. "The demon is strong."

"Did we kill the demon?" Wavier asked.

Hanlott shook his head. "We seriously injured one of them. However, the demon had two other companions. Despite activating the Sealing Barrier spell, we were unable to stop them from escaping."

"Did... did they see the female demon?" This was not a question befitting of the situation, but Wavier could not resist.

Hanlott frowned and stared hard at Wavier, speaking in a serious tone, "Young lad, that is a dangerous thought."

"Master..." Wavier tried to explain himself but was interrupted by Hanlott.

The old man's face had a strict and grave expression; his eyes shone with the bladed resolve he once had in his youthful days. "Wavier, you have a bright future; do not ruin it! I want you to swear in the name of the God of Light. Swear that you will never be

entangled with that demon woman!"

"Master!" Wavier wanted to defend himself, but Hanlott continued staring at him with a stern expression.

In this mental battle, Wavier eventually gave in and whispered, "In the name of the God of Light, I swear, that I will never have any contact with that demon woman. If I ever see her, I will... kill her without any thought."

Hanlott was finally satisfied. He patted Wavier on the shoulders and said, "Good, young lad. Remember, the more beautiful a demon, the more charming and sinister she is. People who are charmed by these vicious creatures usually don't have good endings. I do not want my talented disciple to fall under the hands of a demon."

"Thank you, Master." Wavier felt slightly frustrated, though he also felt gratitude for his master's guidance.

"Alright, go focus on your magic research. Try to get to Level-6 fast and become a Master. Don't let the complacent bastards at East Cove Higher Magic Academy look down on us." Hanlott said as he patted Wavier on the shoulders as a form of encouragement.

Wavier nodded his head and left Hanlott's room. When he closed the door behind him, he sighed and felt the energy leaking out of his body. It was as though he had lost something of great importance in his life.

She is a demon; it is impossible between the both of us... forget about it. Wavier shook his head and continued walking towards the library.

...

Opal City, Market. A common residential house.

Although the Magicians had found some of her traces, Celine had not left Opal City, not even the crowded market area. She merely changed her hiding spot.

It was indeed dangerous to stay so close to the Magician Alliance. However, those Magicians were also her guardians. Their presence would ensure that the demons behind her would not do anything rash.

Celine was on the second floor of the house, nursing her injured arm. This was an injury caused by a spiraling magic knife last afternoon. The injury was extremely deep—so much so that the bones were visible. Fortunately, the Magicians had arrived on time and saved her from her predicament. If not, she would have already been sent back to the abyss.

The wound was stained with the aura of the abyss, and the surrounding flesh had been corroded. She had to cut these pieces flesh off quickly, or she would go insane from the effects of the aura.

Using her knife, she carefully chipped at the pieces of rotten flesh around her wound. This was extremely painful, causing her to shiver uncontrollably with cold sweat on her forehead. However, she gritted her teeth and held on until she was sure that all the corroded flesh was removed. Only then did she lean on the wall feebly and sigh.

She briefly tied her hair which was drenched in perspiration and stared at the roof with her pair of beautiful, moist eyes. There was a spider web in the corner of the roof which had caught an unsuspecting bug. Despite the worm's painful struggle, it seemed to be unable to escape from its predicament. Meanwhile, the spider was closing in on its prey.

Am I the bug who has been caught in the web?

Celine felt devastated. She was all alone in this world in her struggles. Her only friend was all the way in the North and would not be able to come to her aid. She was almost at the limit.

Link, what should I do? A dark-haired young guy seemed to appear right in front of her eyes. At the same time, she seemed to hear his voice whispering, "One cannot choose their own birthright, but they can choose the path they want to take."

But why is my path so rugged and winding? Celine closed her eyes as a teardrop flowed down her cheek.

# Chapter 189

## The Story of an Upright Tiger (1)

Link rushed down to the South from Ferde Wilderness in haste. He crossed the Black River and finally passed through the borders of Leo Kingdom in only three days' time. He had kept this journey a secret, being careful not to let anyone in the world know of his whereabouts.

Once he reached Leo Kingdom, he slowed down his speed and went through a forest where there were no inhabitants to enter into the heart of the kingdom. Then from there, he hired a carriage and headed towards Opal City where there had been reports of high-level demon sightings.

To conceal his identity, Link put on an extra hooded cloak made of ice bear hide on top of his extraordinary Flame Controller Magician's robe. He wouldn't even bring out his wand if there was no need for it. Right now, Link looked nothing more like a wandering Magician.

Leo Kingdom was a rich and prosperous country with expansive mercantile activities. Hence, the roads in the heart of the kingdom were well-paved, safely flat and spacious as well. The roads here were indeed just as good as the King's Lane in Norton Kingdom, so the carriage had been traveling very smoothly and managed to cover quite a large distance in a short time.

In front of them was a city that was sprawled along a river where from afar, one could see tall spires reaching towards the clouds. As they approached the city, they came up to a stone bridge which looked very narrow but had very heavy traffic. Apparently, one must pay a bridge toll before crossing, which created a bottleneck in the traffic there. It made the movements of the carts and carriages very slow.

Link got bored waiting in the carriage, so he took out the Battle Art scroll Vance had given to him and began to study it. This Epic-level Imperial Conqueror Battle Art was indeed a very advanced technique. Moreover, it had been invented by Vance, the founder of Battle Art studies himself. Yet, Link had never come across this peculiar spell in the game before, and he couldn't find it in the gaming system's spell menu either. Thus, Link quickly became engrossed in studying the Battle Art spell.

Tsk, tsk. The deep understanding of the human body and the way in which power is integrated within it is obvious in this spell, Link couldn't help but think. The founder of Battle Art studies really is unrivaled!

Although this spell was a type of secret spell, Link had a deep interest in the studies of Battle Aura and Battle Art; he found it to be potentially very useful. Lucy, Jacker, Gildern and the rest of the Warriors in his mercenary troop would benefit greatly if they were to be exposed to the proper training and cultivation of Battle Art. Once the strength of his allies advanced further, Link's own power would naturally increase as well.

After studying half of the scroll, Link began to form his own opinions on the techniques adopted in it.

This is indeed extraordinary, but it would demand too much of the elemental purity of the practitioner. Not only would one need to have exceptional physical strength, one must be mentally strong as well—this would mean that it would take massive amounts of effort to progress.

Link realized further that a practitioner of Imperial Conqueror must have a perfectly honorable nature and not have a trace of darkness in their heart, in addition to a steely and relentless determination. From what Link had observed of the members of his mercenary troop, the total number of people who were suitable for this technique couldn't be more than ten. Jacker might be able to practice it to its full performance. While the others could attempt it too, their progress would be so limited that they'd only be wasting their energy and time.

This technique's practicality is just too poor, thought Link. Although it is highly effective in improving individual strength, it doesn't do much in improving the overall strength of a troop. If only there were a technique that would allow anyone to practice it and use it to develop their skills to a great result—that would be just great!

Improving the strength of ten people by twofold was always better than improving the strength of one person by tenfold. This was a crucial principle that could mean the difference between victory and defeat in a war!

Right at that moment, the idea of creating a common practice method for the mercenary troop began to take root deep inside Link's mind. It was only a vague idea at this moment though, because he still knew very little about Battle Aura and Battle



Art.

Link then continued to study the scroll. Just as he was fully immersed in it, he suddenly heard a loud roar that sounded as if it had been made by a wild beast. The roar was like thunder that reverberated through the air and almost shook the earth. It had come from the forest that fringed the Opal City, and that one roar had caused flocks of birds to flee into the sky.

The ferocity and the intimidating volume of this roar sounded familiar to Link's ears.

The people in the carts and carriages that were lining up to pay the bridge toll erupted into discussions of what the source of the sound could be, making it harder for Link who was still inside the carriage to listen to the roar clearly. He then threw a silver coin to the coachman and gave him an instruction.

"Lev," Link called out, "go and ask around about the loud roar just now and find out what kind of beast made that sound."

"Yes, sir!" Lev was elated by the silver coin. He then quickly dashed off to investigate the matter.

Ten minutes later, Lev ran back with the news he'd gathered.

"My lord," he said, "people are saying that a magical beast has come to the outskirts of the city. It was said to be a big tiger that stood 13 feet tall. It had arrived a month earlier and had eaten a few people here initially, but it then disappeared without a trace. No one could find it; only roars could be heard coming from the forest from time to time."

"Is that so?" asked Link, whose curiosity was now deepened. "But why would it behave that way? Are there any other rumors about it?"

"Yes, there are quite a few rumors about it," replied Lev. "Some people say the rich merchant Olidor had purchased a tiger fur coat made from the fur of this magical beast. Some people say the beast was from the demonic realm and was sent here to scout the situation in this realm. Other people say..."

Lev continued to recount a dozen other rumors he heard from the townsfolk. All turned out to be mere speculation with no real value and a very low possibility of being true. Link couldn't make head or tails of all this hearsay.

Later, Link paid the bridge toll, and the carriage drove up onto the bridge. When they reached the middle of the bridge, another thundering roar was heard coming from the distant forest. This time, the roar sounded much angrier than the first one and Link thought it sounded even more familiar now.

There mustn't be many magical beasts in this continent that had the form of a tiger and was this powerful. Link had even encountered one such beast himself a month ago... Wait, he remembered it now!

Could it be the Wind Tiger that escaped from Azura Tower? Although he framed it as a question, at that moment, there was no doubt in Link's mind that he got the beast's identity right.

The reason of Link's confidence was that the Wind Tiger's strange behavior in the East Cove Academy that night corroborated with this tiger's odd behavior—if the tiger had been trying to disappear or hide inside the forest, then why was he making so much loud noise all day?

When the carriage had crossed the bridge, there was once again a roaring sound that rang out from the forest. This time, the beast sounded as if it was in pain.

Is it hurt? Link thought with surprise. But who could harm such a mighty beast?

A Level-6 Wind Tiger would have an unimaginably powerful body and formidable combat skills. Moreover, even if it had met an opponent that it couldn't defeat, it would've been able to flee at super speed. Its name wasn't for nothing, after all. According to legends, a Wind Tiger could move up to 300 miles per hour—that's twice the speed of Link's Wind Fenrir. In fact, that's much faster than a sports supercar!

The carriage was fast approaching the city gates by now. Link suddenly overheard some townsfolk talking about the Wind Tiger near his carriage.

"Did you hear that?" said one of them. "That must be the sound of some powerful master capturing the magic tiger!"

"Did the city mayor hire someone to do that?" replied the other. "No, it can't be. I haven't heard of any such rumors."

"Who cares? As long as that beast remains in the forest, we won't be at peace anyway. It's good news that someone finally tried to chase it away or capture. Better yet, I hope

someone would kill the beast."

As they spoke, there was another roar coming from the forest. This time, it sounded even more in pain.

Link was genuinely unnerved now. Someone who could hurt the Level-6 Wind Tiger so much that it would cry out in pain and be unable to flee from must at least be at Level-7!

Even Link knew he wouldn't be able to achieve such a feat himself. If push came to shove and he must defeat the Wind Tiger, then he would have to rely on the Prophetic White Stone's power. Even then, he wouldn't be able to stop the tiger from fleeing!

But are Level-7 Magicians so widespread in Firuman that they can be found anywhere now? Link brooded. He found the matter utterly curious until finally, a possible explanation popped up in his mind.

It can't be one of the escaped prisoners of Azura Tower, can it?

He clearly remembered that on that day, among the escaped prisoners were a big group of Level-6 Master Magicians. Their number was in total no less than twenty. Apart from them, there were five Level-7 Master Magicians; then, there was one who was able to cast a Level-8 deflective spell. Once Vance was excluded from this total count, there would be four Level-7 Magicians left who were currently at large.

Magical beasts had notoriously hardy physical strength. Their flesh and blood, their bones and their fur were all precious magic materials. It would be no wonder that this Wind Tiger would be targeted since he made no attempt to conceal his presence; he emitted such ear-splitting roars announcing its whereabouts to the world.

Once he thought of it this way, Link thought he must get to the bottom of the matter himself now. Those escaped prisoners were mostly shady characters who'd committed serious crimes against the living. They were also exiled individuals who wouldn't find a place where they were accepted in mainstream society. These types of people would eventually fall in with the dark forces, which would one day be enemies that Link would have to eliminate.

Even if he couldn't defeat the opponents now, it's best that Link investigate the matter and gather as much information as he can now.

"Lev, stop the carriage," Link ordered. "I've reached my destination." He then opened the front window of the carriage and threw five gold coins to Lev before the coachman could make any reply.

Lev was naturally stunned once he'd seen the gold coins. He stopped the carriage immediately, where Link then hopped out the carriage and walked away. He didn't enter the city gates, though, but headed instead towards the forest.

Roaaaarrrrrr!!!

It was another beastly cry from the forest, although this time it sounded less like a roar and more like a whimper.

Link cast the spell, Cheetah's Agility on himself to increase his speed and energy. He then concealed his presence with a high-level invisibility spell which masked the sounds of his footsteps, his scent, his Mana as well as rendering his body invisible. Once completed, Link then rushed straight towards the direction where the roars had originated from.

Roaaaarr!!!

Link could sense that the beast was getting weaker now. It sounded as if it was not too far away from him now. Link estimated that the Wind Tiger was probably only a mile away.

Link ran for another three minutes. Then finally, he reached the battle site.

He was at the banks of a small creek in the forest. Trees around him had been uprooted and fell flat to the ground. He could sense that the energy of wind elements and dark elements had recently clashed violently here. There, on the rocky banks of the creek, lay a bloodied tiger, breathing laboriously and struggling to keep itself alive.

Not far away from him stood three people. Two of them were Warriors, each wielding a shield. The remaining one was a Magician shrouded in a thick black fog of dark energy, himself clad in a black cloak that covered his whole body.

The Magician stood right beside the Warriors' shield, as a rope-like stream of black mist poured forth from his wand and entered into the wounds on the Wind Tiger's body. The mist corrupted its flesh and blood with its dark, demonic aura.

The tiger was too weak to do anything but groan in pain. It was obviously suffering excruciating pain at the moment, yet it did not struggle or attempt to move at all. It must've been completely drained of its energy.

After a while, Link could accurately estimate the levels and strengths of the three men there.

Two of them are Level-6 Warriors utilizing dark Battle Aura, thought Link. That's something I've never encountered before. That Level-7 Necromancer, on the other hand, is definitely a Lich. He's definitely from Azura Tower, and he's using a Level-7 Occult transformation spell!

A notification popped up on the interface. Link took a glance and saw that it was a new mission.

**Mission: Stop the Occult Transformation**

**Mission Details:** 1. Kill the occult opponents and save the Wind Tiger. 2. Investigate the identities of the three occult opponents.

**Reward 1:** 100 Omni Points.

**Reward 2:** Soul Stamp (to be used on Battle Animal)

Well then, thought Link. Having seen the contents of the notification, he then accepted the mission without hesitation.

# Chapter 190

## The Story of an Upright Tiger (2)

Forest, Rocky Creek.

The Wind Tiger gasped for breath while he spoke spitefully, "Andrew, I recognize you bastard. Heh, you are clever enough to bring two other helpers. If you had arrived alone, I would have absolutely defeated you!"

"Idiot!" The Necromancer named Andrew sneered and diverted his focus back to demonizing the tiger.

The Wind Tiger had given all hope. He merely said, "Andrew, don't be too complacent. Don't think that joining the Syndicate will make you invincible. You are a prisoner of the academy and will be caught by them soon enough! I don't believe that you can defend against a Level-9 spell!"

Andrew merely mumbled coldly, "The academy is in the North. We are currently in the South; they wouldn't give chase all the way here."

The incident at the East Cove Higher Magic Academy was indeed shocking. He was almost certain that the academy would be destroyed when Tarviss appeared. However, the final results of that battle almost threw him off his feet.

It seemed like a genius who possessed the qualities of a savior had appeared in that damned academy and defeated a Level-8 demon single-handedly. Andrew had originally planned to loot the remaining treasures from the academy after the destruction. However, upon hearing the news, he immediately ran southwards without hesitation.

From his knowledge, he was not the only one who had done so. After the terrifying news got around, all the prisoners who managed to escape from the Tower of Azula went as far as they could away from the Norton Kingdom. A good handful of them went towards the Dark Forest, while a majority of them decided to head southwards where the pursuing hands of the academy could not reach.

This was something to be expected. The Magician was rumored to possess Level-9 strength, suggesting that he was only one step from being promoted to a Legend. Furthermore, he was able to defeat a demon, a race that was known for their natural talent in combat.

As much as the prisoners had faith in their skills and battle experience, this power was not something to be trifled with.

The Wind Tiger could feel that the dark forces had begun to corrode his internal organs. While he was already disheartened, he still would not admit defeat and give Andrew the satisfaction.

"If the Syndicate were to extend their influence to help Morpheus attain the rank of a god, you would have to travel northwards. You will then meet him once again."

"Shut your mouth!" Andrew shouted, looking visibly irritated as he increased the rate of his demonization spell.

"What can you do? What more can you do to me?" The Wind Tiger rebutted. Since he was going to lose consciousness, he was not about to give Andrew an easy time.

A Shield Warrior beside Andrew then whispered, "My lord, do you need me to cut off his tongue?"

Andrew nodded. It was not required for a warbeast to speak. He might as well take away this ability now and save himself the frustration.

The Shield Warrior marched forward with his sword. As he reached the Wind Tiger, he smashed his shield mercilessly onto the tiger's jaw. Under the full impact of the force, the weakened tiger could only scream in pain, causing his mouth to be wide open. Making use of this chance, the shield warrior then pushed his shield into the open jaw, forcing it to stay open. The scene was extremely brutal.

"I'll remember you now. You are dead! You hear me?" The Wind Tiger screamed with a muffled voice. Although he still sounded harsh, his eyes were glued to the sword in the Warrior's hand, his eyes showing a hint of fear.

He had never imagined that a mighty Wind Tiger could suffer such a cruel fate.

"What a sad life I've lead! After being imprisoned for 200 years, I returned home only



to find my wife and children either missing or dead. Now, I am even going to lose my consciousness and freedom! Why..."

The thought of his miserable fate caused tears to roll down his cheeks. Although his cries sounded weird from the shield keeping his mouth open, the tears were real and visible. The Shield Warrior ignored those cries and stuck his sword deep into the tiger's throat, prepared to sever the tongue.

At that moment, something happened!

A scream could be heard in the direction behind him. It was the voice of the Necromancer who just joined the team! The Warrior then heard a warning cry.

"Ambush!"

Ambush?

Before he could react, a huge fist had appeared from the side of the stream and was charging towards him at high speed. It was barely visible to the naked eye and was covered in incandescent flames.

As his shield was stuck in between the tiger's mouth, he was unable to retract in time to defend himself. His sword was also naturally unable to withstand such an attack. At the last moment, the Warrior threw his sword away decisively and crossed his hands in front of his chest while squatting in a stable position. This was the defensive position a Warrior took when they were preparing to release their Battle Aura.

Furthermore, as a pivotal Level-6 Warrior of the organization, he had defensive magic wrist guards on both his left and right arms. He could activate them for a total of three times to defend himself from surprise attacks.

The moment his hands crossed, the magic on the wrist guards was activated. A light tinkering sound could be heard, and a Level-4 circular light elemental shield emerged in between his body and the incoming giant fist.

He had assumed that his Battle Aura coupled with his Level-4 defensive spell and his anti-magic armor would be enough to withstand the collision with the spell.

However, he was wrong.

At the moment when he completed his defensive preparations, the hand changed its form. The spell changed from a charging fist to that of a hand trying to grasp its target. The offensive flames of the hand had also been transferred to the center of the palm.

This hand then gripped the Warrior tightly in its fiery embrace.

The Warrior's light elemental shield could only defend against single directional attacks. Under such immense pressure from all directions, the protection it offered to the Warrior was close to zero. This had rendered much of the preparations the Warrior had done ineffective. He was totally at a loss when the hand managed to get a grip on him.

In an instant, he could feel his Battle Aura being consumed rapidly by the violent assault of flames. Although his armor had anti-magic properties, it was not strong enough to withstand a Level-6 fire elemental spell. The temperature of the armor rose rapidly and soon glowed with a crimson hue.

As the Warrior thought he was about to meet his doom, the hand released him from its deathly grip and went in the other direction. Along the way, it once again changed form back into a charging fist and collided with a spiral spike spell cast by Andrew.

## Spiral Spikes

### Level-5 spell

Cost: 700 Mana Points

Effect: Highly Corrosive. Able to corrode 50 ordinary humans instantly in one hit.

Andrew released this Level-5 spell almost instantaneously, a testament to his strength and control over his magic as a Level-7 Magician.

The fire elements in Link's spell and the dark elements in Andrew's spell then began to contradict one another in a destructive battle.

A low rumble could be heard from the point of collision. The Spiral Spike disintegrated first as it was the lower level spell. However, the dark energy that erupted after its disintegration had greatly damaged the stability of the flaming fist. The spell eventually collapsed as well and started causing explosions in the area.

Using a low-level spell to deal with a high-level spell was a necessary and basic skill for combat Magicians.

It seemed as though Andrew was successful.

Andrew thought so as well. He pointed to the forest at the side and commanded the Shield Warrior beside him, "He is right there. Charge towards him; I will cover you!"

The Shield Warrior nodded. He had already seen his opponent who was currently hiding behind a large tree. He followed the command and charged forward while holding his shield in a protective stance. A thick and stable layer of dark elemental Battle Aura engulfed his body, and he took courageous strides forward.

However, something horrific happened after he took only a few steps.

The flaming fist that had just disintegrated began to reorganize itself at an insane speed. He did not manage to take any more steps before the fist was fully formed. The familiar incandescent glow once again penetrated through the forest and charged towards him at full speed.

Neither the Shield Warrior nor Andrew were prepared for this.

Who in the world could cast a Level-6 spell in less than half a second?

Andrew had prided himself on being able to cast a Level-5 spell instantaneously. However, the anonymous Magician hiding in the forest completely crushed him in a battle of spellcasting speed.

The fist collided with the Shield Warrior as he was hesitating whether to take any more steps forward.

A loud and dull collision sound echoed through the area.

The dark Battle Aura of the Shield Warrior had served as a defensive barrier against the violent invasion of the flames. However, the Shield Warrior was unable to defend against the powerful impact of the flaming fist that could even break through solid concrete walls.

He flew backwards in the direction of Andrew, who was only nine feet away from him.

Andrew was caught totally unprepared. Before he was hit by the Shield Warrior, he instinctively cast a Level-2 Ice Shield spell.

This low-level spell was smashed to smithereens the moment the Shield Warrior collided with it. However, it managed to absorb some of the impacts and reduce the damage of the impact on Andrew. As the Shield Warrior landed on Andrew's chest, he could clearly hear the cracking sounds from where he determined was his ribcage.

He was slightly relieved I would have been dead if I was not a Necromancer!

However, the next moment, his relief turned into horror. He could see the flaming fist charging straight at them. His opponent was giving them no time to react and wanted them dead!

Damn it! Andrew pressed the magic ring on his hand, and he was instantly enveloped in a veil of water.

Transportation spell, an essential escape spell that any high-level Magicians needed to have in his arsenal.

This Magician was a monster. He was done with the mission.

In the instant his transportation spell was formed, he saw the Shield Warrior being caught by the flaming hand. He then heard half a scream before he was teleported miles away.

Although he didn't manage to see it, Andrew could imagine the state of the Shield Warrior after the scream.

The moment he landed safely, Andrew cast his second escape spell without hesitation, The Shadow of the Mist.

Shadow of the Mist

Level-5 Dark Spell

Cost: 653 Mana Points

Effect: Turns the user into a ball of dark energy, giving him unimaginable speed.

Similarly, Andrew cast this Level-5 spell almost instantly. His body turned into a cloud of white mist, and he quickly escaped maneuvering through the woods. Along the way, Andrew could not help but exclaim, "Who was that Magician?"

Although his opponent had the upper hand of a sneak attack, they had three people on their side!

Two of them were Level-6 pivotal Shield Warriors from the Syndicate, while he was a Level-7 Magician. To think that the battle would end overwhelmingly in the favor of his opponent with him narrowly escaping and his two other comrades dead. This was too horrifying.

The suppressive atmosphere in the woods, while his opponent was casting his spells, was almost suffocating. This was the second time he felt like this in the 400 over years he had been alive. The first time was 300 years ago when he was facing a young Bryant. He was similarly defeated and had to escape in fear.

Andrew was not the only one in shock. On the riverbed, the Wind Tiger witnessed the entire scene. He spit out the shield that was stuck in between his jaws and swallowed his saliva in fear. He then said with a trembling voice, "Is he the one?"

# Chapter 191

## The Story of an Upright Tiger (3)

The Magician who was clad in an ice bearskin cloak walked out from the forest under the watchful eyes of the Wind Tiger. The hood of the cloak covered most of the Magician's head, concealing his face. As he walked, hints of garnet Magician's robe beneath the outer cloak were revealed, and in his hand, the Magician was holding an exquisitely well-made wand.

At first, the Wind Tiger saw the figure but still couldn't recognize the mysterious Magician's identity. But, the heavily wounded Warrior beside him was much quicker in this regard.

"That's the Starcatcher wand!" he shouted. "And you're wearing the Flame Controller Magician's robe! You're Link!"

This Warrior had been a core member of the Syndicate, so he was familiar with the weapons and gear of the strongest figures in the continent. Furthermore, Link had been the one who had completely wiped out the Girvent Forest branch of the Syndicate and single-handedly killed the demon Tarviss, so naturally, the Syndicate took special notice of any news and information about him.

It was no wonder then, that the moment Link appeared the Warrior could easily pin down Link's identity with just a few details exposed.

Link had planned to remain anonymous in front of these people, but the moment he heard the Warrior's words he went silent for a while and decided to pull down the hood of his outer cloak. The moment he did that the fire elements that revolved around the Flame Controller were suddenly revealed in all its glory. These elements flowed all around Link's body and then gathered at the top of his head, forming a visible crown of flame.

The snowy white bearskin cloak, the bright red fiery aura, the glorious crown of flame and the intense fluctuations of Mana energy around Link's body all combined to carve a striking figure whose power and talents were most obvious to even the least experienced of observers.

Just as it was on earth, an intimidating external appearance was very useful in the world of Firuman as well. With a presence that Link radiated then, the last remnants of defiance in the Warrior's eyes were now gone and were replaced instead with a look of fear and awe.

There stood right in front of his own eyes, the very person who had crushed the Level-8 demon Tarviss with a magical fiery hand. Even though the Warrior was himself an elite member of the Syndicate and was respected and feared by thousands of people, he still couldn't muster up the courage to hurl insults at such a mighty figure.

"You shouldn't be here!" was all he could manage. "Why are you here? Shouldn't you be in the Ferde Wilderness?"

The intelligence network of the Syndicate had done a very good job apparently, even though they still weren't good enough to outplay someone like Link.

Even the Wind Tiger was stunned! It had seen the Magician who had defeated the demon Tarviss that night, yet this man still exceeded all its expectation. Never in its dreams had it ever imagined that anyone could drive Andre into a corner and force him to flee in just a few attacks!

That was truly impressive!

Link approached the Warrior until he was about 20 feet away from him. He then bent down his head and looked down at the Warrior.

The armor on his body had mostly been scorched by the Flaming Hand earlier. There were burn wounds all over his body, although some traces of Battle Aura still remained. Albeit, it was now far too weak to pose any threats to Link.

He then examined the armor closely and discovered that it was pure black with an engraved insignia on the chest. It was an inscription of a dagger with six drops of blood trickling from it—the insignia of the Syndicate. The six drops of blood signified this Warrior's level and position in the organization.

"The Syndicate, huh?" Link remarked.

The Warrior made no reply.

"The Shadow Shield?" added Link.



Previously in the game, Morpheus had by this point ignited the Sacred Fire. Because of the powerful MI3, the Norton Kingdom in the North was still largely unaffected by the rise of the Syndicate. But here in the South, the whole region had by now fallen into the tight grips of this evil organization.

This was due to the emphasis on trade and commerce by the six southern kingdoms, which meant that their military power was weak. Moreover, these were only six small kingdoms who couldn't amass enough power and resources on their own to fight against such an expansive organization like the Syndicate. Thus, the southern kingdoms became the fertile grounds for which the Syndicate grew in power and influence—so much so that they were said to be ubiquitous here.

Meanwhile, the Shadow Shield was an elite branch of the Syndicate which comprised of shield-wielding Warriors.

"How do you know anything about the Shadow Shield?" asked the Warrior with terror in his eyes. This wasn't something that a Magician from the North should know about!

"Oh, I wasn't sure earlier," said Link smilingly, "but now you've confirmed it."

The Warrior was left speechless. This kind of interrogative technique was one of the first things he'd learned as the core member of the Syndicate. How embarrassing was it to inadvertently leak the secrets of the organization by falling into such a benign trap!

Now that the matter was confirmed, Link noticed a notification lighting up on the interface. He looked over at it and realized that it was the message of a completed mission. He'd now earned 100 Omni Points and the Soul Stamp. Link showed no discernible reaction to this news and turned back towards the Warrior.

"I don't feel like fighting anymore today," he told the Warrior. "But I'm not letting you go either. You know what to do, don't you?"

The Warrior breathed a long sigh of relief at Link's remarks. He knew that there would be no chance of him defeating this Magician and no chance of escaping alive. If he continued to fight him, it would only bring more suffering and pain to himself. The only choice left for him was to commit suicide.

The warrior then took off his armor and promptly stabbed a dagger straight into his own heart. With one decisive move, the dagger pierced through his skin and flesh and

struck his heart. The Warrior then slumped to the ground, dead by his own hands.

The Wind Tiger watched the scene with shining eyes, his heart filled with awe and respect for the Magician.

He uttered a few words and the Warrior obediently killed himself without a protest, thought the tiger. What a fearsome man!

Once he'd made sure that the Warrior was dead, Link then turned his attention to the Wind Tiger.

"Do you have a name?" asked Link.

"Yes," replied the tiger proudly. "My name is Dorias."

"I see," replied Link tersely. He circled around the weak and heavily wounded Dorias and discovered that it was not in mortal danger.

"I'd really like to know," said Link again, "what you were thinking hanging around a forest that was so near to a big city. Don't you know how bottomless the greed of humans can be and what danger that would bring you?"

"Oh, but Master," lamented the tiger after a long sigh, "you don't know the pain of a broken heart!"

As it spoke, the tiger dragged itself to the banks of the creek and slumped down haplessly. Not a trace of ferocity could be found in its eyes, only the wistfulness of memories.

"Enlighten me," said Link, his interest now piqued.

Dorias' eyes concentrated as he tried to recall the events that occurred all those years ago. He lay there silently for a while before finally spilling out his story.

"Did you know that this whole region was a lush forest 200 years ago?" began the tiger. "Back then, I was the king of this forest. Us Wind Tigers were few in numbers and were spread far apart. Every full moon night of the spring we would all gather together and feast on small animals, engage in conversation and play games together, forming tight bonds among our kind and finally choosing a mate for the year."

As the tiger reached this point in his story, its head slumped sorrowfully and hung limply over its shoulder.

"At the time, I had a mating partner who'd been with me for more than a decade," said Dorias. "Her name was Ora, and she was my queen. She had thick and soft fur that was pure green in color and a slender figure. I'm always intoxicated by her gentle eyes, and even after all these years, I can still distinctly recall that surge of pleasure I feel when I'm mating with her. I'm the strongest of my own kind, and I could always sustain it for a full minute. A full minute! Can you believe that? I know all my brothers could only sustain it for half a second! Yet now everything is gone... my queen, my children, my home—everything has been buried by time and belongs to the unreachable past now."

Then, the Wind Tiger turned around to face Link with a face distorted by grief and pain.

"Human Magician," he addressed Link, "you will never understand the depths of my despair. I have nowhere to go now. Why don't you bring me back to Azura Tower? Although it can get quite boring in there, at least no one would bother me."

Well, then, now that the tiger had spilled out his story; Link began to understand the motive behind his seemingly odd behavior earlier. He stared at the thick black fog that surrounded the tiger, then he reached for his wand and pointed it towards Dorias.

"Expulsion!" he chanted.

Expulsion

Level-5 Spell

Effects: A high-level dispelling spell that can expel very strong magic from a target.

This was a spell Link recently mastered in his spare time. It was from a notebook written by Master Magician Grenci where he recorded invaluable lessons he'd learned and his precious experience along with his Supreme Magical Skills. Naturally, Link found the spell to be interesting, so he took the time to master it.

Once the spell was cast, a fist-sized light orb radiating with the colors of the rainbow took form at the tip of Link's wand and flew straight towards the Wind Tiger Dorias. It danced around the tiger for a while, showering it with its glorious light. Everywhere the light hit on the tiger's wounded body the remnants of dark energy and dark

elements that remained inside were squeezed out and scattered into the air.

Once the spell was complete, Dorias' body was completely purged and purified, and not a thread of dark elements remained. It moved its body tentatively and started to stand on its feet. It then began to walk in circles. At first, his steps were wobbly and unstable, but soon enough, it regained its footing and gained its speed again. Even the wounds on its body were almost healed now, and the bleeding had completely stopped. He was recovering at an astonishing speed!

It must be stated that one of the reasons for its speedy recovery was the Wind Tiger's own relentless will to live. It then stopped in its track and turned towards Link.

"Master," it said, "did you come down south to eliminate those fugitives?"

"No," answered Link as he shook his head. "I had another plan in mind." Even so, Dorias' question had reminded him that there were still some mighty and, most probably, evil escaped prisoners still at large. He should do something about it.

As for this magical beast, he had at first intended to keep it as a battle animal and used the Soul Stamp to control it and keep it in its place. But now that he'd heard the beast's story, Link had started to empathize with Dorias, so much so that he felt uncomfortable using the Soul Stamp on it.

The reason for this was simple, it wasn't so much out of sympathy, nor did he intend to let this beast go free. He just felt that for such an upright beast who also possessed high intelligence, there would be no need to use the Soul Stamp or any other spell to get his loyalty. Instead, a few simple psychological tricks would suffice.

Link made a move as if he was about to leave, but then turned his head around at the last moment.

"The human world is full of cruelty and greed," he said to the tiger. "It's too dangerous for a magical creature like you. You should escape and go as far away from here as possible and don't come back. Also, don't commit any more crimes."

After that, Link pulled up his hood and simply turned around and left.

Dorias was caught off guard by Link's actions. This was completely unlike what he'd expected to happen. This Magician had saved his life and banished dark elements from his body, yet he just left him here before he could even say thank you?

"Hey, wait!" shouted Dorias. "Are you mocking me?" Dorias was a mighty Wind Tiger after all! He would never just run away from his obligation to repay a debt of gratitude!

Link ignored him and just kept on walking. He soon entered the forest and continued heading towards the South. After about half a mile, he heard the rustling sound of light and swift footsteps following him. Soon the loud voice of the tiger emerged out of the silence of the forest.

"Hey! Human Magician!" shouted the Wind Tiger. "Where are you going?"

"Why would that concern you?" asked Link, concealing a smile.

"Of course it concerns me!" answered the tiger. "You saved my life! I can't just leave you! This isn't the way I, the honorable Wind Tiger Dorias, should behave!"

Link smiled secretly but remained unmoved in his words.

"Don't worry about it," he said. "It was no big deal."

"It's no big deal to you, but it was a matter of life and death to me!" answered the tiger. "Besides... I have nowhere else to go. And now that the Syndicate had put a price on my head, it won't be safe for me to move alone. Why don't you let me go to the Girvent Forest and hide there? I won't harm anyone, I promise!"

Although Dorias could be a little too upright and naive sometimes, it was still very clear of the tight situation it was in at the moment. It was aware that the world was a dangerous place for a magical beast. Right now, there must've been countless other pursuers who were out to capture it. If it still remain as a lone tiger, there was no hope for it to survive!

If it wanted to live, he would have to find strong allies. Obviously, the Magician in front of him was a man powerful enough to save him. Furthermore, he had saved its life, yet did not demand it to do anything for him in return. Dorias was sure that this was the kind of man he could trust!

Link knew Dorias was in his hands now.

"How about we work as a team?" suggested Link. "I will protect you and give you shelter, and you will become my Warrior. Once we return to the North, I will let you stay in my estate. I will order my people to prepare food for you that would suit your

taste, groom your fur, trim your nails, clean your teeth and so on. If you want to, I can even send my people to find you some wives. Would you like that?"

"That doesn't sound too bad at all!" answered Dorias, his eyes shining brilliantly. He never even dreamed of such luxurious treatments! Tsk. He might even get a few wives and would have people serving him all the time. Just thinking about it had made his mouth water!

"Very well, then," said Link. "If so, then kneel down now and let me ride on your back to the Opal City in the South."

"Alright; you're not that heavy, anyway." Dorias then somewhat reluctantly let Link step on his back. He would only allow this for someone like Link. Had anyone else make this kind of demand to him he'd eat them up in one bite, even if they had saved his life!

The Wind Tiger's speed was indeed as fast as it was rumored to be. At first, Dorias was jogging slowly as his body was still weak from the attacks. But then, Link cast the Elemental Cure on Dorias, so its speed accelerated very quickly as its body healed. It had taken them less than two hours to traverse the distance of about a hundred miles, and they were now at the gates to Opal City.

"There's the headquarters of the Southern Magician Alliance in the city," said Dorias. "It's full of Magicians there; I can't go near it."

"Fine, wait for me here," said Link. "I'll be in the city for a while."

Link then hopped down the tiger's back and entered the city gates. His perceptive soul had now detected the tangled mess of dark energy inside the city even from here.

There are definitely demons from the abyss in this city! Link thought. Good. That means that Celine isn't far from here then.

...

In a Southern Magician Alliance Meeting.

Right at the moment when Link entered the city, a brand new investigation team had just left the Mage Castle and was entering the Opal City as well. The team comprised of 30 people and was led by Master Magician Hanlott. Among the members of the team

was one of Hanlott's disciple, Wavier.

"The demons are evil entities that must be exterminated," said Hanlott before their departure. "Whoever stands in our way in this mission will be regarded as our enemy, whether it's the Syndicate or anyone else!"

"Exterminate the demons!" echoed the team members.

Wavier had joined his colleagues in shouting those words as well, even though he was unknowingly gripping his Merlin's Wand tightly in his hand. An image of the woman who had stolen his heart popped up in his mind.

Forgive me, thought Wavier as he gritted his teeth. This is my duty; it is what I have to do.

Hanlott didn't notice his disciple's odd behavior. He could only sense the high spirits and full enthusiasm shown by the Magicians in his team and was deeply satisfied by it.

"Let's go!!" shouted Hanlott. It was his last command before they left the Mage Castle and head for the Opal City.



# Chapter 192

## The Mighty Festival of Endless Slaughter

Opal City Market.

There was a famous pawn shop in the area with a peculiar name. The shop was called the "Little Pawn Fish." The assistant had an honest look on his face while the shop owner always had an inviting smile. They seemed ordinary enough.

However, this was all a farce. This shop had a hidden secret on the second level. The second level seemed to be the shop owner and assistant's bedrooms. However, closer observation would reveal that the second floor seemed smaller than what it looked like. One could not specifically point out exactly which part of it was peculiar, although there was something visibly not right about the building.

The pawn shop had no customers today. This was a common sight. One would usually not see long lines at a pawn shop. However, once they managed to strike a deal, they would probably earn enough to support themselves for a long time. Hence, only a few customers would enter the shop occasionally for business matters.

The entrance to the pawn shop was usually a one-way ticket. The people who entered the shop planning to strike a deal often do not appear again. One also could not find any traces of the person in the shop. It was as though he had evaporated into thin air.

Where did the person go? No one cared. The market was filled with people who had come from other poorer districts and areas. Everyone was only concerned with their own livelihoods.

At that moment, a figure clad in a full body, gray cloak entered the shop. He then spoke in a raspy voice, "The shadow engulfs the world!"

Upon hearing those words, the inviting shop owner respectfully greeted him and said, "Sir, this way please."

The mysterious figure nodded and headed towards the second floor. They walked along the corridor till they reached a dead end. The mysterious figure then gently

pressed the wooden wall with his skinny and sinister finger. All of a sudden, the plain concrete wall became a shining wall filled with glowing runes. The man then pushed the wall with all his strength, causing the wall to move backwards, revealing a narrow staircase leading down towards the basement. Faint voices could also be heard traveling upwards.

This was the entrance to the secret underground chamber. Who would have thought that the secret entrance to a basement would be built on the second floor instead of the first? The staircase was well hidden in the gaps of between the two walls. It was extremely narrow. However, as this mysterious figure was very skinny as well, he could walk through the stairs with ease.

There was a sharp bend along the staircase. Once one got past the bend, dim flickering candle lights could be seen, and the voices would become more prominent. One could even hear strange breathing sounds.

The mysterious figure then walked towards the secret underground chamber.

This chamber was extremely huge—it was at least 60 feet in length and width. There was a table in the middle of the room with a candle stand on top of it. Under the dim illumination of the candlelight, one could see five vague figures sitting around the table.

To be exact, it was two humans and three demons.

The three demons had a stature similar to humans apart from their hideous appearance. One of them had two big axes as his arms instead of hands, one was a giant lizard in a human form, while the other was a giant toad also in the form of a human. When this creature breathed, one could hear strange bubbling sounds as the vesicles on the side of his cheeks expanded. The vesicles also seemed to hold black a sinister-looking liquid.

When the mysterious figure appeared, an Assassin wearing a crimson armor whispered, "Andrew, you are late."

The leather used in the production of this armor was extremely special. As he moved, one could see traces of blood mist emanating out of it. The presence of this mist concealed much of the Assassin's presence and made the contours of his body vague. Even in such close proximity, it was difficult to determine his exact position.

"You cannot blame me, Bren. There has been an accident along the way." The mysterious figure was Andrew, the Necromancer who was just defeated by Link.

"Accident? What about the two shadow shields I sent as your protection?" The Assassin named Bren was in disbelief. Andrew was a Level-7 Necromancer. Furthermore, he had specially equipped him with two Level-6 Shield Warriors. There should have been no one in the entire Leo Kingdom who could stand up to such strength. What kind of accident could have happened?

Andrew sat down and sighed. "Something happened when we were trying to capture that Wind Tiger. An outrageously strong Magician appeared out of nowhere. The three of us couldn't even scratch him. The two Shield Warriors are already dead. I had to use all my power in order to escape."

"Magician? One versus three? Did you recognize him?" Bren did not accuse Andrew right away. He knew that one could not simply look at the results. Although Andrew indeed messed up their plans this time round, he had to first determine the threat they were up against.

Andrew helplessly laid out his hands and said, "The battle happened too quickly. It was a sneak attack, and I did not get a good view of his spells. However, he only used one spell the entire battle. It was a giant handmade of fire elements. It looked like a Level-6 Fist of Firomoz spell. Though in the middle of the battle it did change form..."

"A flaming hand?" another figure that was under a cloak suddenly spoke. The sound was exceptionally delicate, like that of a young lady.

"Yes, Lina. It was a hand of fire." Andrew shrugged his shoulders as he commented. Although the Magician was young, she was a High Elf, a race with natural talent in magic. She was merely 40 years old but had already attained Level-6. He treated her with the utmost respect.

Upon hearing Andrew's words, the High Elf called Lina turned to Bren and said, "The one from the North seems to have arrived."

Bren was horrified, "The one from the North? You mean the Demon Slayer, Manipulator of Flames, Link?"

Lina nodded.

Andrew immediately understood his defeat. "No wonder he was so strong."

He fled early that night and did not witness the entire battle. After hearing the terrifying news of the appearance of a Level-9 Magician, he made his way to the South at full speed. Hence, he naturally did not recognize Link's signature move.

He then heaved a sigh of relief. He thought he had really gotten old and weak such that any random Magician could make a fool out of him easily. He had been frustrated and depressed this whole time. However, after knowing the true identity of his opponent, he felt a lot more at ease.

He was still strong. The only reason he lost was because his opponent was way stronger!

Bren had nothing to say as well. In the face of an opponent who had just crushed a Level-8 demon, Andrew had proved his strength simply by escaping unscathed. To have met that person during their mission was simply their bad luck.

At the same time, he was met with new problems. He looked at the demon in front of him and said, "Ballie, this is bad news, The Magician who killed Tarviss might very well be here for Princess Celine."

The demon with axes was the leader of the three demons. He was the strongest at Level-6. If he had to fight against a human of a similar level, he could probably take on up to five of them at once due to his combat talent as a demon.

However, he was not confident enough to face off with a Magician who could defeat even Tarviss. He had no faith in his own abilities and said with a trembling voice, "What proof do you have that he is here for the Princess?"

Bren took out a scroll and threw it towards Ballie, "This is his information, given to us by The Death's Hand. In Gladstone City, Princess Celine once saved his life. The fact that General Lund failed in his attempt to kill him was partly due to the Princess' intervention as well. Based on this connection they had and his unknown motive for coming down south, what do you think?"

Ballie fell silent. One could tell his unease and fear from his heavy breathing.

The lizard demon then whispered, "Leader, he is alone. We have an entire group behind us."

The lizard demon then turned towards Bren and said, "You can't just watch for this one. You also have to help."

Bren stayed silent while Lina, who was sitting beside him started shaking her head. "We will not intervene directly. The most we will do is to aid in your retreat if needed. You should know that he is not our only opponent. If we deal with him, we will also make enemies with the Magician Alliance, and Opal City is its headquarters!"

Bren silently acknowledged Lina's statement.

However, Andrew suddenly commented, "I think this is a chance!"

"What?"

"How is this so?" Everyone in the room looked at him, awaiting his speech.

"You see, Link is here for Princess Celine. He is definitely here to save her. However, the Princess is a demon and the target of the Magician's Alliance. As long as we sow discord between the two parties, Link would become enemies with the Magician Alliance. We just need to wait for the perfect chance when both sides are terribly injured. We might even secure a total victory!"

A glimmer of hope appeared in everyone's eyes. However, Lina merely sneered and disdainfully said, "Andrew, if you think he will be fooled so easily, I think you have underestimated his power."

Andrew stood firm to his views, and he defended them. "There is a risk to everything. This is especially true for Master's goal. If we don't take any risks, we will never get any results! Bren, what do you say?"

Before Bren could speak, the axe demon immediately replied, "My master's promise still holds. As long as Princess Celine is brought back safely, he will support your master with all his might."

This speech was like a sharp knife that immediately severed the hesitation in Bren's heart. "May the shadows engulf the world. This plan is possible, though we need to plan it in great detail."

Andrew's face then broke out into a satisfied and sinister smile. While he could not defeat Link alone, with the help of so many powerful people and the Magician Alliance,

it might be possible. Even if Link were to defeat everyone, his reputation would go down the drain. It would be devastating for him either way.

Although Lina had differing opinions, she knew that the plan was set in stone, and nothing she said would change their decisions. She then pulled down her hood, revealing her pale flawless skin and an expressionless face.

Bren ignored the overly cautious female Magician and laughed, "This will be a mighty festival of endless slaughter!"

...

The extermination team of the Magician Alliance had already reached the area outside of Opal City marketplace. They started splitting up into groups of four except one which was formed by only Hanlott and Wavier. There were a total of eight groups.

"Our informant has identified the hiding place of the female demon. We will seal her escape routes. Remember, once you see the target, go all out and exterminate her. Do not hesitate!"

Hanlott cast a glance at his own disciple, Wavier as he said these words. His motive of bringing him on this mission was to sever the impure thoughts running through the mind of his talented disciple once and for all.

It was his responsibility to guide his disciple up the correct path.

Wavier could feel the pressuring gaze coming from his mentor. He did not evade it this time round and stared back, his eyes shining with resolve.

"Good." Hanlott was satisfied, "Commence attack!"

# Chapter 193

## Dark Undercurrents in the Opal City

In Opal City.

After entering the city, Link found a dark corner to change into another attire. He took off the Flame Controller Magician's robe and the ice bear cloak and changed into a very plain-looking gray long robe. He then used a non-toxic alchemy potion to dye his hair brown, then tied a plain cloth around his head. Added to his already unremarkable looks, Link had now transformed from a Master Magician into a plain pedestrian.

Once that was done, Link began to snoop around the city for any news of unusual events that recently occurred. He'd spent a hundred gold coins within half an hour doing this, after which his understanding of the underworld in Opal City had deepened. He'd also gathered much information about Celine's current plight.

Celine must now be hiding somewhere in the downtown area, Link surmised. There are still three demons here, and they had the aid of the Syndicate. This isn't good news for Celine at all since the downtown area is where the Syndicate's influence is overarching. At the same time, the Magician's Alliance placed many of their people in that area. The moment Celine appeared she would instantly be traced by both the Syndicate and the Magicians Alliance there.

This was the information he gathered so far. In this situation, even if Link actually found Celine, he would still have no idea where to hide her. The walls and the streets were full of spying eyes all waiting to catch her in their traps.

Link then quietly contemplated the matter for ten minutes after considering all the information he'd gained.

He had a plan.

Link immediately put his plan into action. He circled and wandered aimlessly through the downtown area for a while. He went into the big streets and small lanes, and each time he stopped at a crossroad, he would stop in the middle and write down some

special runes in the hidden corners of the wall using his specially created quill pen and invisible ink.

The pigment of the ink was a special invention made by the master alchemist, Grenci. It was great for quickly jotting down secret runes. Link had found this in Master Grenci's notes and thought it might come in handy someday.

The shapes of the runes Link jotted down were somewhat complicated, but Link could jot it down perfectly in about three seconds. Once that was completed, the invisible ink would penetrate into the stone wall and leave no trace of the rune to be detected from the outside.

At every large intersection, Link would leave about eight to ten runes on the wall, spending a total of one minute doing it. At any small intersections, he would leave about two runes there, spending no more than ten seconds there. Then, Link would continue to walk down to the next junction before anyone could suspect that there was anything amiss about him.

The entire downtown area of Opal City was a circle of about half a mile wide, with six main streets comprising of 3 vertical streets and three horizontal streets. There were also more than ten small lanes and alleys and about a hundred intersections. Link had left runes at every one of these intersections without a single omission.

Then about an hour later, when Link had walked through half of the downtown area he suddenly came across a shop called Little Fish Pawnshop from which he could sense a dark abysmal aura.

So this is where you bastards are hiding, huh? Link jeered. Not bad at all, I must say.

It would be nearly impossible for the average Magician to detect this very faint aura through the hustle and bustle of the busy commercial area of the city. But to Link, the strength and power of the demons were as clear as a flaming torch under a black moonless night sky. He could easily sense the presence of the demons from about three hundred feet away.

One of the reasons why he was this perceptive of the demons was his strong soul which had been boosted by the God of Light. The other reason was because he had dealt first-hand with a demon before, so he had become familiarized to the aura and presence of the demons from the abyss.



Link circled around this pawn shop and left more than 30 secret runes there as he did so. When he had completed a circle and was once again at the shop entrance, he saw a figure clad in a loose black cloak entering the shop.

So you're here as well huh, Andrew? Link thought. You're quite fast!

Link had managed to arrive so quickly because he had the Wind Tiger that could cross the distance of a hundred miles in two hours. Andrew was only an hour later than him, which meant his speed was quite impressive. (Note: Because the flying spells were too conspicuous and were very likely to incur dangerous accidents, they were not the most efficient mode of transportation and were rarely used by Magicians. The Wind Tiger, on the other hand, was quite safe and could reach a destination a speed that was only second to teleportation.)

Link turned away from the pawn shop and walked down towards the next block to leave more secret runes. Another hour had passed when he'd almost drawn secret runes at every intersection of the downtown area. Link reached a place near the city gates where he saw a group of Magicians at the entrance.

Is that the demon-catching team from the Magicians Alliance? Link wondered. It seems that they've begun their operation. Have they sniffed out the demons' hideout? Or did they find Celine?

Link was deeply troubled by this possibility. He observed the thirty-strong group of Magicians closely and slowly took a step back to blend into the crowd. He then quickened his pace and rushed towards the merchant bank in the downtown area.

He'd noticed earlier that the bank was the tallest building downtown; he could observe the whole area from its rooftop.

Link reached the bank very quickly, and he cast a high-level invisibility spell on his body. He then walked into the bank as if he had stepped into his own house, not worrying about concealing his presence at all. He then headed towards the staircase inside and finally reached the attic within half a minute.

The attic was occupied. There was a small bed, a tiny desk, and various other daily necessities. Most importantly, there was also a young man writing at the desk. Link walked up behind the young man and glanced at the words he was writing. He discovered that he was a novelist busy at work. Link read a few lines of what he'd

written and found out the hard way that this young man wasn't in the process of writing the next literary classic at all. He was, in fact, writing a vulgar erotic novel that involved the depraved act of bestiality between a man and his mare.

The Magician's Alliance team was fast approaching the area, which meant that Link had no time to waste now. He pointed his wand at the young man's head and chanted, "Slumber."

The young man's head slammed into the desk, and he fell straight to sleep. Link hurriedly closed the door and made sure that it was locked. He then canceled the invisibility spell and walked to the front of the attic window. There, he turned around and pointed his wand at the floor and chanted, "Clean."

The stains and dust on the stone floor were immediately cleared out and what was left was a clean, polished floor that shone as new. Link took out his magic quill pen and started to draw a magic seal on the floor. He didn't use the invisible ink for this magic seal but had opted instead for silver ink. One by one, the almost perfectly drawn runes appeared on the floor. After about three minutes, Link had successfully drawn 246 magic runes which created a complete magic seal.

After that, he put the wand away and sat cross-legged in front of the magic seal.

He pointed with his finger at the controlling runes. Mana started to flow into the seal and lit up the runes in the magic seal one-by-one. Once Mana had filled up the magic seal, a layer white silvery light appeared on top of the magic seal. It was as clear as water, and its form altered rapidly. After five seconds, the scene of the whole downtown area was represented there on the surface of the magic seal right in front of Link's eyes.

There were a few moving spots in this real-time map. Each spot was of a different color—some were red, others were green or blue, and there were also black smoky light rings. These all represented four different important classes of strengths: professional fighters below Level-4, Magicians, demons, and Warriors.

This spell was called Heaven's Eye, and it came from Anthony's notebook.

Heaven's Eye

Level-4 Secret Spell

Mana Consumption: 420 Points

Effects: Through the remote interaction of the magic seal and detecting runes, the spellcaster will be able to see everything that happens within the area where the secret runes have been left. The spellcaster can also communicate with a target who is within the area through telepathy.

(Note: This is a highly covert spell, but it also requires the spellcaster to have an immensely robust soul.)

There would hardly be anyone else whose soul was more suitable for this spell than Link. He was currently using the spell to observe a vast area of a city, which was something that had never been attempted before. Had Anthony known the scale that Link was utilizing his spell, his eyes would've popped out of their sockets as it was far beyond the spell creator's own imagination!

Link scanned quickly through the entire map and finally found an extremely restrained black orb that just lay there unmoving in the attic of an ordinary city-dwellers house. Link instantly recognized this aura as none other than the Demon Princess Celine Flandre!

I've finally found you, Celine. A smile cropped up on Link's face, although it quickly dissipated as Link noticed that the group of Magicians he saw earlier weren't heading for the lair of the demons. Instead, they were now surrounding the area where Celine was hiding. By the looks of it, they must be spreading out in order to block all the possible escape routes that Celine could use.

In other words, these Magicians had begun their operation because they'd found Celine's exact location.

If things went on like this, in ten minutes all of Celine's possible escape routes would be blocked, and she would have nowhere to run. If that happened, the only way Link would be able to save her was to attack the Magicians Alliance head on. If he did that, although he might be able to save Celine, trouble would follow him. He might even be expelled from the Realm of Light!

No, that wouldn't happen. He still had time; he could still save Celine now.

Link took a deep breath and focused his eyes on the black orb that represented Celine. He directed his Mana to the black orb and began to speak in his mind.

Celine, it's me, Link.

Immediately afterwards the black orb showed intense fluctuation, and soon enough, a pleasantly surprised voice emerged in Link's mind.

Is it really you, Link? Celine asked. Where are you?

There's no time to explain now, replied Link. You're in grave danger. You must listen to me and do as I say. Leave the attic now by jumping out of the back window. That's right, jump out now!

From the lights on the map, Link saw how Celine had done exactly as he told her to immediately and without any hesitation. He sighed in relief at this. Now that he knew Celine trusted him, there was a higher chance now that he would be able to take her away from Opal City.

At that moment none of the members of the Magicians Alliance team noticed any changes in Celine's actions. They continued to close in on her previous location and tried to block every possible path which she could use to flee.

However, somewhere else the Syndicate had detected the anomaly. Five minutes later, Bren received a report from his underling.

Signs of the Princess' movements discovered.

Bren creased his brows in confusion. He thought that it must be a mistake. Link hadn't yet appeared, so why did the Princess make a move without him?

"Lina," he instructed a High Elf Magician beside him, "check the current movements of Princess Celine."

"As you command," replied Lina plainly.

She then took out a clear crystal ball of about six inches in diameter and grasped it in both of her palms. A moment later, the crystal ball lit up and inside it was a scene of the downtown area.

The scenes changed several times until it stopped at the scene where a blonde-haired girl appeared.

"That's the Princess," said Lina after taking a glance at the girl. "She must be in some kind of disguise, but she can never trick my eyes."

"Do you recognize the area?" Bren asked the demon, Ballie. "Prepare for action now, and head to the place immediately. Don't ever let the Princess die at the hands of that group of Magicians. But remember, if Link doesn't appear then you don't appear as well, except as the very last resort."

Ballie stood up and waved his hand impatiently at Bren.

"You didn't need to say anything," he said. "I know what I should do."

He then turned to his two underlings and ordered, "Let's go!"

"Master," said Bren to Andrew once the three demons had left. "To be perfectly honest, I don't trust the demons. They tend to be so impulsive. Didn't you see how they barged out just now..."

But Bren had forgotten how smart and careful Andrew was.

"I'll be watching over their actions," he said as he got up to his feet. "I will never allow those idiots to drag the Syndicate into the dumps."

Bren nodded. How could he forget that Magicians were smart people after all?

At that point, Opal City's downtown area still looked calm, and everything went on as usual. The streets were crowded with people, and merchants and customers were busy buying and selling. None of them seemed to notice the dark undercurrents that were roiling in the underbelly of the city.

The Magicians were then busy setting up their nets and were getting ready to pull in the big fish. The Syndicate was preparing to ambush the predator that lurked in the dark and was getting ready to pounce at the very last moment. Celine, who was the prized prey in this situation, was moving quickly but stealthily through the streets of the downtown area where they were densely packed with people.

By this point, some Magicians had noticed that there was something wrong and began to change their directions towards Celine. All the possible escape routes that could save Celine were rapidly blocked off, though Celine remained oblivious of the fact. There would be no point in knowing it anyway, because all she had to do was listen to

the voice that was guiding her in her mind.

Celine trusted Link with all her heart.

But who would emerge as the winner ultimately?

Nobody knew. Even Link who was safely hiding in a secret spot was in a cold sweat. All he could do now was to trick the two powerful forces to play a dangerous game against each other.

# Chapter 194

## Help from an Outrageously Powerful Being

Opal City

"That demon has realized our plan," a Magician said as he saw a blonde figure skid past him on the streets. He recognized her immediately. He did not identify her through her features, but the aura emanating from her body

"Give chase!" the Magician beside him shouted.

This group of Magicians then started chasing the blonde figure. At the same time, a Magician in the group activated a rune stone he held tightly in his hand. The rune stone then began to shine and emit powerful magic fluctuations. This fluctuation was stable and regular. It spread throughout the entire market district of Opal City, sending a clear message to all the Magicians currently stationed there.

"The demon is between Leiden Road and the Altai Mountain; we will go over from the South!"

"The north exit will be sealed as well."

"Activate the barrier; seal the exits!"

One magic fluctuation followed another as the Magicians transmitted information amongst one another. The 30 over Magicians on this mission seemed to be operating efficiently with strong chemistry. They formed an almost impenetrable network of blockades, swiftly encircling Celine in their grasp.

Link's voice constantly sounded in Celine's mind. Stop, someone is blocking the road in front. Head left immediately and jump over the stone wall. It is not very tall.

Just as Celine jumped over the stone wall, she saw a group of Magicians running towards her. These Magicians were all at least Level-4 in strength and the leader was

even a Level-5 Magician. If Celine were to be involved in direct combat with them, she might be able to achieve a narrow victory, but at the same time, she risked meeting the backup groups that would arrive soon after. She would then be trapped in a hopeless situation.

Therefore, she could not be held back by a battle.

"Damn it, the target leaped over the wall and is now in Wyeth Street," one person in the group saw Celine's actions and cursed.

The moment Celine leaped over the wall, Link said, Stay put and wait. Ten, nine, eight, seven... okay. Now go back to the other side of the wall and walk along the same road.

Celine once again leaped over the wall. The group of Magicians had long ran off in another direction, going on a detour to the location they thought Celine was at. Who would have thought that Celine would turn back to a previously dangerous spot.

This had allowed Celine to tear a small hole in the almost impenetrable defense set up by the Magicians.

Alright, now continue going forward. Do you see the exchange building two blocks away? Run towards it... wait, retreat! Hide in a shop and pretend to be buying something.

Celine immediately backtracked and ran into a shop. It was a hat shop, and she grabbed one frantically and placed it on her head. She then stared at the mirror on her side to act like a customer trying on a hat.

Five seconds later, a group of Magicians ran across the street she was supposed to cross. They missed Celine just like that.

Alright, now go out and run 90 feet in front of the intersection. Then hide in the clothing store, Link ordered.

Celine followed the instructions accordingly. She had no idea how Link was doing all these. However, after many close shaves with the Magicians, she had complete confidence in Link and executed her actions with conviction. Sure enough, the moment she entered the clothing store, another group of Magicians ran past the street and missed Celine by a few seconds.



Bren and the High Elf Magician Lina was observing Celine's actions through a crystal ball. After seeing the skillful maneuver of Celine through the City, Bren had a tight frown on his face. Something was not right.

Lina then spoke, "Do you feel like she has eyes on the back of her head?"

"It's not even just that! It seems as though she can foresee the future. She is playing hide and seek with the Magicians," Bren commented.

This was not the first time he had crossed swords with the demon princess. He had a good gage of her abilities. Previously, when the Magician Alliance sent a ten-man investigative team to crack down on her location, she was already at her limits.

However, now that the number of Magicians had increased to 30, she had gotten the upper hand instead. It was all too strange.

Lina smiled, "Bren, don't you feel that someone is giving her directions in the dark?"

"You are saying...?" Bren was increasingly horrified by the prospects.

"He should already be here." Lina had a smile of disgust and mockery on her face as she sneered. "Andrew's plan was crap to begin with. It would be enough for him to give directions from afar. He did not even have to appear physically."

Bren's face sank. Lina was completely relentless with her words. If Andrew's plan was really crap, then as the person who agreed with it wholeheartedly, it must have reflected really badly on him.

However, he knew that it was not a time to lose his temper. He said, "What do we do now? The Magician Alliance seems to be useless. Are we really going to let this demon princess get off the hook?"

Lina did not answer. She kept her eyes fixated on the crystal ball. After ten minutes, she suddenly spoke, "The tables have turned."

Celine seemed to have run into some trouble.

Two people could be seen in front of her. One of them was old and frail while the other had silver eyes and hair. The two of them were not deceived by Celine's disguise. They directly blocked Celine's path of escape.

A hundred and fifty feet behind the two of them was the exchange building of Opal City's market district. Celine was now 60 feet in front of them. In the crowded market district, all the Magicians had gotten news of the new location and were making their way here rapidly.

Although the fish was agile and nimble, the net was cast too far and wide. She was eventually captured.

Bren's eyes widened. "This group of Magicians will not let her live. Link will then have to appear physically to save her. Alright, Hanlott had started casting his spell. Hang on; Link is going to appear soon... Damn it! Why did Ballie charge out!?"

The scene depicted on the crystal ball was extremely clear. The first few people who rushed out in Celine's defense was not Link, but Ballie and his two assistants. Ballie had his own concerns as well. To him, the Syndicate's plan towards Link was only second in terms of priority. His main concern was still his master's order.

When he left the abyss, his master had only one request: "Bring back my daughter. She must be alive!"

The princess had to be alive. If she was killed, who could withstand the rage of the master? Therefore, to hell with the Syndicate, Bren, Andrew, and Lisa. This group of Magicians was about to kill the princess; he had to protect her life!

The three demons rushed out together and couldn't have cared less about Celine. As long as she was alive, they could always find her again. However, these two dangerous Magicians had to die!

Hanlott and Wavier originally thought victory was already in sight. They did not expect back up forces to arrive at this crucial moment. Three Level-6 demons—an axe demon, a lizard demon, and a toad demon—charged towards them from three different directions.

"Damn it, Wavier; Defend!" Hanlott shouted. He then canceled the spell he was casting to prevent mutual mana disturbance.

Wavier had quick reactions. Mana surged into his Merlin's Wand and caused the strong Epic Wand to glow in five different colors. A rainbow dome then appeared, surrounding Hanlott and Wavier in its defensive barrier.

This was the spell stored inside the Merlin's Wand—Elemental Sanctuary. It was a Level-6 spell that could be cast instantaneously, possessing extremely strong defensive strength.

The barrier was formed in the nick of time as the three demons reached their side. The demons then ferociously attacked the defensive spell as Ballie shouted to Celine, "Princess, please leave! Do not care about us!"

Celine was speechless. She never intended to save them anyway.

Once again, Link's calm voice sounded inside her mind, Bypass them and enter the attic in the exchange building. There will be a transmission magic circle inside.

Celine was euphoric. She quickened her pace and bypassed Hanlott and Wavier.

Hanlott had also heard Ballie's screams. He now knew that this female demon was a key figure in the demon world. Otherwise, the three demons wouldn't have called her the princess and risked their lives to save her.

"Wavier, stop that demon! Leave this place to me!"

Hanlott then let out a low bellow as mana surged into his staff. The howling sounds of the wind could immediately be heard as he shouted, "Wrath of the Storm!"

Wrath of the Storm

Level-5 spell

Cost: 900 Mana Points

Effect: An extremely strong wind elemental spell. It can create a high-speed rotating cyclone that will fling the target into the air. The wind blades will then chip at the target's flesh continuously.

One-and-a-half seconds later, this Level-5 spell had taken form. A huge cyclone surrounded Hanlott's body. At the same time, he made use of the power of the wind to fling Wavier in Celine's direction together with his Elemental Sanctuary spell.

This intricate spellcasting technique not only prevented the interference of mana between their spells, but also closed the gap between Wavier and Celine. It was a

testament to Hanlott's strength.

The three demons did not expect to be attacked all at once and were caught off guard. They were then flung 30 feet into the air by the cyclone and continued rotating in mid-air. Apart from being unable to retaliate, their flesh was also constantly chipped off by the countless wind blades menacingly attacking them. Fortunately, these demons had a tough exterior. This spell would merely render them immovable and slightly injured.

On the other side, Wavier had reached a comfortable attacking distance after the help of his mentor. The figure that he had missed day and night was finally right in front of his eyes. However, he had to kill her with his own two hands.

What was the most cruel thing in the world? That would be having to kill a girl that you fell in love with at first sight.

That was the exact mission Wavier was tasked to accomplish.

Celine had felt the incoming danger and unsheathed her sword. However, even before she brandished her sword, her defensive preparations had already broken Wavier's heart.

He wanted to stop and turn back. However, the words of his mentor, the oath he took in the name of the God of Light, the strange looks he got from his fellow Magicians—all of these images started flashing through his mind. They then coalesced into a strong and powerful voice, She is a demon, don't have any mercy! This is all for the cause of justice!

This voice was so strong that Wavier momentarily forgot the pain of his own soul. He raised his Merlin's Wand and began charging it with mana, activating the Level-6 offensive spell stored within.

Elemental Disintegration!

Elemental Disintegration

Level-6 Combined Elemental Spell

Cost: 1020 Mana Points

Effect: Combines the mysterious forces of all the elements and ignores any defensive

power from Battle Auras. Directly disintegrates the elements within the target's body.

The only drawback of this spell was its inability to lockdown on the target. It would thus easily miss when fired from afar.

However, Wavier was now merely nine feet away from Celine. Even if Celine were a swordswoman who prided herself on her speed, she would still be slower than a Magician's thought process.

An invisible power began to emanate from the wand before accumulating into a giant translucent ball. A beam that emerged from this translucent ball and flew straight towards Celine. The moment the attack was released, Wavier felt a great deal of remorse in his heart. However, what's done was already done. There was no going back.

Wavier was completely dumbfounded, and his eyes seemed to be robbed of its usual glimmer. He closed his eyes as he could not bear to see the results.

However, in the next moment, his mentor roared in frustration, "Damn it, it's a transportation spell! Some powerful being is helping her in the shadows!"

Wavier was pleasantly surprised. He opened his eyes and saw an elemental image of the female demon after the transportation. A quiet and beautiful smile seemed to have appeared on her face in the final few moments of the transportation.

She did not know any transportation spell. Someone must have helped her along the way. But who?

Wavier suddenly had mixed feelings about this. He felt some remorse, pain happiness, and even jealousy.

Who the hell did this? Another demon? Why did she have such a calm smile? Was it someone that she loves?

Wavier was extremely frustrated, and his whole being was cloaked in a deadly gloom.

In a dark alley, Andrew seemed to witness Wavier's mood transformation. He was first shocked before a sinister smile appeared on his face. "His soul seems to be damaged. That means..."

He had no idea why he was so elated. He also ceased to care about the demons who were still thrashing about in the air and left the scene.

# Chapter 195

## We Must Be Flexible to Achieve Great Things

A flash of light suddenly appeared out of thin air with a buzz in the forest on the outskirts of Opal City. From that point of light, two people emerged and fell to the ground from the height of six feet above the ground.

It was Link and Celine who had escaped here with the help of the spell, Dimensional Jump.

To prevent from being transported to the top of a big tree, Link had set a good destination point in advance before he entered the city. It was slightly above a nice clearing in the forest where he had parted ways with the Wind Tiger earlier.

Thud! Thud!

Link and Celine had fallen on a bed of soft grass, so neither of them were badly hurt. They were both still in a daze which was a common side effect of the people who had just been through Dimensional Jump.

Celine was a strong Warrior, so she felt nothing from the fall at all. Link, on the other hand, wasn't much stronger physically than a layperson, so he was still seeing stars for a while after the fall.

As he lay on the ground to recover, Link felt a weight pressing on his body and the light that was streaming into his eyes got blocked. He opened his eyes and saw that Celine was half leaning on top of his body and was looking down at him. The distance between their two pairs of eyes was no more than eight inches.

Link noticed how even at such a close distance Celine's face still looked smooth and delicate like the surface of jade stone. Her black eyes were clear as crystal and as vivacious as young fawns in the forest. Her arched brows gave off a flirtatious charm, and her lips were as red and shiny as red pomegranate seeds.

It's no wonder that she was one of the top four most beautiful characters in the game! She looked perfect no matter which angle you look at her from.

"You saved me this time, Link," whispered Celine. The gentleness in her voice echoed in her eyes as she looked straight into Link's eyes.

Link almost fell into a trance and had the urge to reach out his hand to caress Celine's cheek but was afraid that it might be inappropriate. Although when he thought about it, wasn't it the perfect moment for at least a kiss?

But reality never turned out to be as perfect as imagination.

Just as Link was enjoying the moment, a rough and crude voice suddenly rang out near them. It was the Wind Tiger.

"What are you waiting for, Link?" shouted Dorias. "Your woman is ready to mate with you!"

The voice had appeared so suddenly that it gave Celine the fright of her life. When she turned around, she saw the green-furred giant tiger who just jumped out of the forest. She quickly jumped away from Link and pulled out her blue crystal sword.

"What's up with the beast, Link?" she asked.

By that point, even Link himself was a bit annoyed at the tiger.

"That's Dorias," he answered as he sat up. "It's a Wind Tiger. It was the one who had brought me here to the South."

"This is Celine Flandre," Link then told Dorias. "She's my... good friend."

"Oh!" replied the tiger. He then stared at Celine with keen interest and even circled around her. Suddenly he turned up his nose and turned back to Link and asked him, "Argh! Why do I smell dark energy from her?"

Celine's face darkened as soon as she heard those words. She had always regarded her true origin the greatest shame in her life. Still, her aura and inner force were things that she could not conceal, and they were the things that anyone who'd encountered her would point out without fail. Although they didn't always mean it as an insult, it still caused her to be upset.

The perceptive Link knew instantly what Celine was feeling and thinking the moment he saw Celine's eyes darkened. But he didn't think he should evade the subject this



time, so he decided to explain the matter plainly and honestly to Dorias.

"Let's get moving," he told Dorias immediately after getting up to his feet. "We must make for the North now; I'll explain everything about Celine on the way."

"Fine, then." Dorias took another glance at Celine and realized he must've hurt the girl's feelings, so he stopped pressing the matter entirely and crouched down to let Link climb onto his back.

Link then signaled to Celine to climb up as well. Once they were both safely settled on the tiger's back, Dorias then promptly headed towards the North.

"Celine's father is the Lord of the Deep, Nozama..." explained Link.

Dorias was so shocked its feet almost got tangled and lost its balance.

"What did you say?!" he exclaimed. "The Lord of the Deep Nozama? You're not jiving me, are you?!"

Even though Dorias was a magical beast who had lived for over 400 years and had lived to witness countless powerful figures, Nozama still remained—after all these years and all that he'd seen—one of the top three most fearsome figures in the whole wide world.

To Dorias, Nozama was the kind of powerful figure who could topple the whole Firuman continent upside down with a flick of his finger! Even 300 years ago, in the time of the legendary Magician Bryant, Nozama was infamous throughout Firuman for his frightening power, and the demon Tarviss was, in fact, his underling!

Although the demon couldn't descend upon the Firuman continent himself, legends said that he would transform himself into an ordinary human form and walked the earth, leaving many half-blood spawns behind.

Of these descendants of his, some possessed mediocer talents with only a low level of dark energy in their bodies, while some were said to be extraordinary geniuses who could each set off a wave of terror and destruction throughout the continent. When he thought of this point, Dorias sneaked a look at the girl on his back. He thought the legends must be true and that the girl riding on his back must be one of the most talented descendants the Lord of the Deep had ever had.

"Celine's father had always tried to capture her and bring her back down to the deep abyss," Link continued. "He'd even sent some demon minions of his here to do so. The reason I came down here was to rescue her from them."

"But, how will she escape a powerful figure like the Lord of the Deep for the rest of her life?" asked Dorias.

Celine noticed how Dorias showed neither scorn nor hatred towards her, so she began to relax. She then shook her head gently in reply to the tiger's question.

"If I fail in the end," she said, "then I would rather choose to die by my own hands."

"You truly are a tenacious girl!" replied Dorias. He then continued without thinking. "It's no wonder that Link likes you!"

Celine blushed and turned towards Link. She saw that his face was full of smiles and that, for some reason, cheered her up immediately.

"Still," Dorias continued, "the problem of Nozama will still loom over us like a big dark cloud. Link, have you thought about how you're going to deal with his demon minions?"

Dorias wouldn't worry about any other people, not even the Level-7 Necromancer Andrew, because he had faith that Link would have no problem in defeating them. Nozama, though... Just the mention of his name was enough to make Dorias' knees buckle and the courage drain completely out of its body. In fact, Dorias found that he was shaking at that very moment!

This was a very real problem indeed. Celine half-turned her head and glanced at Link herself. She was surprised to find that the smile still lingered on his face.

"Nozama isn't as frightening as you might imagine," said Link calmly.

"Don't be stupid, Link," said Dorias in disbelief. "Nozama? Not frightening? You must be joking!"

Link remained unperturbed by Dorias' reply.

"Right now," he began to analyze, "I'm already able to fight against a Level-8 demon, and I'm still very young. My strength still has a large room for improvement. In a year

or two, I might even face a Legendary-level demon. Moreover, this isn't a battle that I will fight alone. Right now, I'm building my estate and my own army. If Nozama dared to send his demon minions, then I will kill them all. I believe that after ten years, even if Nozama came here himself, I will still face him without any fear."

Link had said those words with full confidence, and he knew that the confidence wasn't misplaced or just an illusion of grandeur on his part.

One very simple reason was the fact that the deep abyss where the demons came from was of another realm. The demons must expend a huge amount of energy just to enter this world. According to legends, in order to send the demon Tarviss into this world, a total of 1000 souls of high-level demon Warriors were sacrificed. Such a high price was something that even the great Nozama could not afford to pay easily.

In other words, merely one talented daughter was not worth such a sacrifice.

Dorias was sure it would burst into maniacal laughter had these words been spoken by anyone else. It might even bite their head off afterwards for being so conceited. Still, because they had come from Link, the mighty Magician who had recently killed Tarviss the Level-8 demon, he felt that those words carried much weight and credibility and deserved to be taken seriously.

"Alright, alright, I get it," said Dorias good-humoredly. "I know you're a powerful figure yourself!" He then said nothing more and kept on running.

Link was sitting comfortably behind Celine on the tiger's back, his arms hugging the surprisingly slim waist of the demon Princess. Celine had made no protests at his gesture, making him enjoy the ride back to the North with an unimaginably gladdened heart.

After a while, he decided to break the truth to Celine of his motives.

"Celine," he said, "I need your help to do something once we've reached the North."

"Go on," responded Celine with a smile. Although it was true that Link had made a great leap in improvements since she last saw him, she was still at Level-6 herself and was far from useless dead weight.

Link then explained everything from the events leading up to him being awarded a piece of land by the king and his need to change the climate of his estate, up to his

meeting with the Lich Vance, and how he promised to help him reclaim his underground palace.

"The underground palace is a complex labyrinth," said Link finally. "I need the help of a Warrior with outstanding skills, so I thought of you."

"Then you've found the right person," said Celine, clenching her delicately pinkish fist in the air keenly. She couldn't be happier to help Link.

Dorias shook his head as he heard Vance' name and the description of this figure.

"I know the bastard," said the tiger. "He was the only one in the Azura Tower who refused to leave. He was even less willing to take part in releasing the demon Tarviss. Had it not been for the fact that the tower had been blown up into pieces, I'm sure he'd still be there wasting away in that damned rotten place."

"What? Is that true?" asked the surprised Link. He was glad to hear of this account of Vance because he had been suspicious of the Lich. But after hearing what Dorias had to say about him, he felt he knew more about the Lich now and started to reconsider him in a new and more positive light.

By the looks of it, Vance might actually be a decent person who was worth cooperating further with. After all, the Lich was the man who had founded the studies of Battle Aura and Battle Art. So, who could be better in helping Link to develop a special Battle Art that could be practiced by everyone in his troop of Warriors?

Meanwhile, Celine was curious about this figure herself.

"Did you say that this Vance is a Lich?" she asked.

"A Lich my ass," replied Dorias. "He's just a skeleton!"

Celine turned around to face Link and smiled at him.

"A Lich, a magical beast, and now me, a demon," she said. "Link, aren't you afraid that we'd get you into trouble?"

"Hahaha, don't worry," replied Link with a smile. "It's no big deal. I can handle it."

Link's remark wasn't out of arrogance; it was only out of the self-confidence and the

faith that things would all work out fine. In the past, he'd been afraid to come into contact with anything or anyone associated with dark magic, and these people were, to the average Magician, just the kind of people that he must avoid like the plague. Yet now, he'd seen through the situation and the consequences that everyone was in much more clearly.

He had been afraid to associate himself with dark magic because he feared that he would be sucked into the darkness and had his wisdom and judgment affected by the darkness himself. He also wanted to protect his resolve and his principles so that he might never deviate from the main purpose that he had been sent here in the first place.

He didn't want to associate himself with the Magicians who practiced dark magic or to any creatures who had been involved with dark energy, because he was worried of the public opinion and his reputation.

In the past, he was only an insignificant Magician's Apprentice of the East Cove Magic Academy, so such a negative reputation might indeed be unfavorable to his growth and progress as a Magician in the future. This was because he could easily be ousted and banned from the world of magic simply because he'd made one Master Magician suspicious of him. Even Herrera might easily discard of him and send him away had she found out that he was involved in less-than-savory things like dark magic.

But now, he had gained his own reputation and status and was no longer an insignificant weed on the ground. He was a mighty oak tree that stood proud and tall among the others. His words alone carried great weight and influence throughout the Norton Kingdom and maybe even the whole Firuman continent. By this point, he had little cause to worry himself about such petty matters as a little criticism from the public.

As the saying went, when the water was too clear there would be no fish. If he, as a lord in his own right, were too rigid with rules and too obsessed about towing the line there wouldn't be much hope in his future. The most important thing to do when attempting something important was to amass alliances and forces from as many areas as he could.

Now, it was the Lich Vance who was able to help him to transform the climate of his estate. He now believed that Vance deserved his full trust, so Link would cooperate with him without any hesitation or misgivings about the Lich's shady past.

It was as the popular saying went: a true hero did not concern himself with the past, only the present.

As long as Link knew the limits that he would never cross, even if the truth were exposed, no one would be able to punish him for anything. At most, someone might exhort him about the matter, and Link already had a way to deal with this—he would just ignore them!

Seeing how confident and calm Link had become now, Celine couldn't help but recall the events during that fateful night in Gladstone.

He was still a young boy then, she thought. But in a blink of an eye, he has now become a noble lord with a high reputation as a Magician across Firuman. Ah, how time flies, and how quickly he has changed. Celine wasn't too disturbed by these turn of events, though. She just settled down calmly and found herself a comfortable space right there in Link's arms.

The three of them chatted and laughed for the rest of the journey. Dorias' body had almost healed perfectly now, so his speed had improved and was as lightning fast as it had once been when he was in his prime. And so they headed to the North.

...

At the same time, Opal City had descended into utter chaos. The demons had appeared on the streets and were in a fierce battle with the Magicians. About 236 civilians were caught up in the scene, of which 127 were dead. It was simply a massive disaster!

Soon, the whole city was overcome with panic. The people were in fear while the leaders pointed their fingers at the Magician's Alliance and accused them of misusing magic. The Magician's Alliance, in turn, retorted that it was their duty and highest priority to exterminate the demons and that the deaths of the civilians were unintended but inevitable. While it was a pity that many innocent people were caught up in this event, the Magician's Alliance had promised to make compensations to the families.

The leaders of the kingdom then replied that human lives could not be measured by gold coins. The Magician's Alliance had been too rash and allowed too much power, so there must be an established royal decree that would limit the activities of these Magicians. This statement received widespread support from the people as soon as

the word spread out.

The people didn't care whether there had been demons or not; what they knew and clearly saw was that the unlucky people had died horribly, or they were heavily injured because of the Magicians.

At last, the Magicians Alliance had to relent and give in to the pressure from the authorities above and the common people below.

Meanwhile in the underworld, as the highest authority of the Leo Kingdom's branch of the Syndicate, Bren was not happy of their limited success in constraining the Magician's Alliance at all. His face was as dark as the blackened bottom of a pot because Princess Celine had once again slipped through their fingers. Furthermore, all three demons were now killed by the Magician's Alliance, so he no longer had the aid of the Lord of the Deep, Nozama anymore.

Overall, everything had been an utter failure!

It was true that he knew where Celine had fled to, yet he couldn't think of a way to pursue her in the North. Besides, Bren knew that it would be crazy to attempt to recapture Celine from the hands of that bastard.

The members of the Syndicate knew how stormy Bren's mood was at the moment, so they all avoided him the moment he approached.

Meanwhile, the Necromancer Andrew had gone out every day and wouldn't come back for about twenty hours. He'd wear a maniacal smile on his face every time he returned—only heaven knew why he would act so bizarrely.

# Chapter 196

## What Dreadful Weather

Two days later, Dorias entered the Ferde Wilderness together with Link and Celine.

After running through the area for around ten minutes, Dorias could not help but comment, "Link, is this truly your territory? This is the most barren land I've seen in my entire 400 years in Firuman. You cannot even find a proper place to take a dump in this place."

Celine also frowned at the sight of this territory as she said, "This is a lot worse than what I've imagined."

Along the way, Link had warned the both of them that the territory was extremely barren so as to prepare them psychologically on what to expect. Celine and Dorias originally thought that it was normal for a wild plain to be barren and thought nothing much of it. However, it was still difficult for them to accept it the moment they saw the Ferde Wilderness' true form.

This was more than just barren. The whole area was simply a pile of rubble that seemed to be unsalvageable no matter how much gold coins one invested.

Although Link was ambitious and already had a detailed plan in his mind, it was undeniable that the current situation was unsatisfactory. He simply laughed, "It will get better. This is just temporary."

As those optimistic words were said, the weather began to change. It was only a few gusts of wind at the start, but ten minutes later, the wind started howling, and one could distinctly feel the raindrops splattering onto their bodies. It did not take long for the weather to completely turn hostile, into a storm with hailstones and lightning. What a way to welcome two new guests into the area.

"No wonder you wanted to change the climate." Celine gasped as she was horrified at this sudden change in weather. Dorias immediately activated his wind elemental shield and protected them from the rainwater and the hailstones. However, an ordinary person would be powerless in the face of such weather. It would not be



possible to grow crops or house farmers in this area.

As Dorias carefully trod through the mud, he asked, "You mentioned that there would be people serving me. Can I just not take up your offer? Just let me go to the Girvent Forest and hide to the end of my life."

Dorias felt that this place was extremely unsuitable for a Wind Tiger to call home. His lifespan would be shortened by 100 years.

"We had a deal. Are you going to go back on your words? What about the pride of the Wind Tiger clan?" Link rebutted.

Dorias roared in despair and continued forward helplessly. He felt as though he had been deceived. He was unable to go back on his words as he had to protect the legacy of the Wind Tiger clan. Furthermore, Link had promised to find him some female tigers as companions.

The Scorched Ridge appeared in sight after half a day.

Although there were no Magicians in the Scorched Ridge, Link was not about to take any chances. Before they entered the camp, Link handed an intricate pendant over to Celine.

"This is an aura concealing pendant. It can also double up as a dimensional storage pendant if you'd like."

This was a pendant Link crafted in the carriage while he was heading south. Although it was a rushed work, Link still ensured it was delicate and aesthetically pleasing so that it would not trigger his Obsessive Compulsion Disorder.

The pendant was created from Khorium and shone with a lavender hue. There was a hint of thorium used as well, which gave it speckles of silver much like the stars in the night sky. Finally, Link used a high-quality Dokun stone to create the dimensional storage function in the pendant. The stone was milky white in color and was polished almost perfectly by Link, making it crystal clear and smooth.

Celine loved the pendant at first sight. However, she did not take it from Link's hand. Instead, she lifted her chin slightly and spoke with her back facing Link, "Put it on for me."

Link smiled and gently put the pendant around Celine's slender neck. From his angle, he could vaguely see the enticing scene right under Celine's blouse.

Link was suddenly flustered and immediately averted his gaze and changed the subject, "Dorias, do not lose your temper when you get to the camp. Also, don't joke around too much; you might cause panic amongst the people."

"Alright. Just don't forget what you promised."

Link then turned to Celine and said, "Do not showcase your powers as well. Just stay secretive."

"Then what will be my identity?" Celine looked at Link expectantly as she asked.

This question was tough. Link thought for a moment and said, "You are a friend I brought back from the South... a very good friend. That's all."

He wanted to make their relationship sound more intimate, but at the same time, he was afraid that Celine would be unhappy. It would also not be right to make it sound as though they were strangers. Hence, friends would be the most valid term.

Celine simply agreed; it was impossible to tell from her expression what she felt about this identity.

It had merely been four days since Link left the Scorched Ridge. However, the weather in this period had been disastrous. From afar, Link could already see potholes and planks of wood being blown off the rooftop by the strong gale. There would occasionally be a figure that would appear only for a few seconds, only to rush to the next shelter they could find.

It was impossible to continue with the building for the harbor in this weather. Link was also sure that all the other developments were also halted. Everyone was probably staying in their homes and waiting in a state of boredom.

This is not looking good. The climate problem has to be resolved as fast as possible! Link felt that it was a pressing problem that had greatly affected the progress of his territory development.

When Dorias reached within a 150 feet radius of the castle walls, Link could hear the blaring sounds of the alert siren echoing through the Ferde Continent. It seemed like

the Flamingo Band of Mercenaries were still vigilant despite the bad weather.

A moment later, the castle guard who was originally taking shelter in the corner of the castle wall rushed out into the storm. Ten seconds later, Jacker also appeared on the castle wall in full battle armor.

Link was extremely satisfied with this reaction speed.

At that moment, Jacker caught a glimpse of Link riding on top of the giant tiger. He wiped his face drenched in rainwater and raised his hand to signal the archers on guard, "It is the lord, put down your weapons!"

Upon knowing that it was Link, the tense atmosphere immediately dissipated.

The pressure coming from a giant beast more than 12 feet tall was immense. However, seeing that their lord was sitting comfortably on its back, there should be no complications. In their eyes, the lord could accomplish almost anything. Even if he came back riding on the back of a giant tiger with a beautiful lady by his side, there was nothing to be surprised about.

As Link entered the Scorched Ridge, Celine and he dismounted from Dorias' back. Jacker, Lucy, and Gildern were already waiting in the storm to welcome him.

Link waved his hand and said, "Don't just stand outside. Let's talk in the house."

He then spoke to a mercenary captain, "Find some workers, a decent number of them. Build a big shed within an hour for Dorias over here. This is an urgent arrangement and remuneration will be given accordingly."

Link then passed ten gold coins to this mercenary captain.

The workers in his territory were all people who came over from the Girvent Forest to earn money. His words as the lord of the Ferde Wilderness held no power over them as they were not citizens of this area. He hence had to use gold coins to mobilize them instead. As for the exact payment, they had a detailed agreement. For example, a task like this which required the workers to be mobilized instantly and to work in the storm would garner the workers at least one silver coin in remuneration.

Link had never defaulted on his payments. Therefore, although the conditions here were tough, there were a number of workers who had decided to make the Ferde

Wilderness their base.

"Yes, sir." The mercenary captain said and immediately went off to organize the required manpower.

Link then turned to Lucy. "Get the chef here to roast an entire cow for Dorias. Oh, Dorias is the name of this tiger over here."

Dorias then spoke, "One is not enough. I need two cows. It doesn't even have to be cooked; just give it to me, I am starving."

His ability of speech came as a surprise to everyone present. However, this meant that it would be possible to converse with him, making him a lot less intimidating.

Lucy then immediately went over to the barn for the cows. Dorias followed closely behind as he was simply starving.

The rest of the people entered the house.

Once they reached the hall, Link introduced, "This is Celine Flandre, a Magician's Apprentice of mine, and a good friend."

The Magician's Apprentice part was something Link thought of on the spot. He had remembered that Celine once studied magic in the Flemmings Magic Academy. Following which, he then introduced Jacker and the rest to Celine.

They exchanged greetings as Celine responded with a warm smile on her face. Link observed the expression on her face as he wanted to see her thoughts. However, his usual keen observation skills seemed to have failed him this time round. After failing to get what he wanted, he eventually gave up.

Lucy then came back, and Link introduced her to Celine officially this time.

Lucy had a much sharper expression on her face. After alternating her gaze between Celine and Link, she gave a smile and passionately welcomed, "Celine, look at how pretty you are."

These were the exact words Link's mother Lilith used on her that day.

Celine smiled and said, "Miss Lucy, you are a beauty yourself as well."

Lucy simply sighed, "I am already old."

As Lucy spoke, she subconsciously looked at Link. Link, on the other hand, was preoccupied as he was talking to Jacker. Celine could observe the hint of disappointment in Lucy's eyes and immediately went on guard. Not good! Lucy will be a formidable enemy; She seems to like Link as well!

Link was totally oblivious to this psychological battle going on and sat down on the long table before saying, "The climate here is simply horrible. However, I have found one solution. In a week's time, I will be leaving once more, and when I am back, we can start work."

This had helped to boost the morale of the commanding team. A glimmer of hope could be seen on everyone's faces as Link said those words. Although the territory was indeed barren, there was hope after all. The only thing troubling them was the climate, which they had no idea how to resolve. Link's announcement was thus a huge relief.

The atmosphere immediately lightened up as everyone started giving their opinions on the future development. Link listened intently and occasionally interrupted. At the end of the meeting, they came up with a few feasible things they could work on.

At that moment, a person appeared at the door. It was Magician Carrido.

Carrido had been staying in the Girvent Forest recently as he was currently responsible for magic affairs. He was the middleman between Link and Merchant Warter, handling all the magic equipment Link crafted and Warter's payment to the territory. Hence, he would not be in the territory most of the time.

He greeted Link respectfully before handing him a dimensional pendant "Sir, these are the earnings this time around."

Link took a look and found 15000 gold coins within the pendant. It was once again a good trade. After thinking for a moment, he handed his dimensional pendant back to Carrido and said, "Take this money to East Cove Higher Magic Academy and find Master Magician Weissmuller. He is an expert in creating magic puppets. Tell him I want a giant puppet that can do traditional tillage work." Weissmuller's proficiency in magic puppet creation was evident in his notes. The first person Link thought of when he wanted a magic puppet was naturally him.

Carrido did not understand it at first. "Magic puppet for tillage purposes?"

Link explained, "Yes, I have already observed that the inner area of the territory has soil that is completely arable. We simply needed to get rid of the layer of gravel around 2 feet thick on the surface."

Usually, the soil on the surface of any plot of land would be arable. However, the Ferde Wilderness was a peculiar place where the surface of the ground was covered in gravel instead. The arable soil of this land was hidden underneath the two-feet-thick layer of gravel. This magic puppet would thus be responsible for turning the soil over. Furthermore, Link was also prepared to exploit the anti-magic soil that could be found on this land.

Carrido nodded and said, "I will work on it immediately."

"There is no hurry. Take some rest." Link waved his hand before handing over a magic book titled *Breath of the Wind* to Carrido. He then said, "This book should be helpful to you. Take some time to read it."

Carrido was immediately filled with gratitude. He took the book and carefully put it away.

The magic books that Link recommended were usually of another level. He had already read five of such books by now and had a completely different understanding of magic as he did in the past. He could now be considered half an official Magician due to Link's tutelage.

After a few discussions over superfluous stuff, Link then started arranging a place for Celine to stay.

Lucy said, "The camp is currently full. Miss Celine can stay with me for now. She can move in to the new wooden houses when the construction work is complete."

Link thought that it was a good idea and looked at Celine, to which she nodded with a smile. It was a good chance for her to test out Lucy's true intentions. After which, Link left the hall and returned to his room to craft magic equipment for Warter. He also had to create Vance's magic staff. As the climate problem was indeed pressing, he had to quicken his pace and complete the underground chamber mission as fast as possible.

As Link exited the wooden house, he saw Dorias sitting comfortably under a shed while munching on a large piece of barbecued meat. He looked as though he could swallow the cow whole including the bones. There was also a piece of raw, bloody

meat beside him, to which he ignored completely.

It seemed like this creature had already been subdued by the chef's barbecue technique.

# Chapter 197

## The Mad Genius Vance

One week's time had passed in a blink of an eye. Meanwhile, Link was cooped up in his wooden cabin creating magical gear all along.

Once he'd received the notebooks from the Magicians of the East Cove Magic Academy, Link's enchantment skills had now broken into a whole new realm. Within a week, he'd managed to create two epic quality magical gear, comprising of one Level-5 wand and another Level-5 bracelet fixed with a defensive spell.

The bracelet was for Celine, of course. It was so exquisitely made and Celine adored it so much that she couldn't put it down for a second.

Afterwards, both of them then headed to Shark Bay to meet up with Vance.

The passage into the underground palace would be too narrow for Dorias to pass through, so there would be no point in him following them. Thus, the tiger remained in a protected area specially built for it in Scorched Ridge. Link had also fulfilled his promises to Dorias and ordered his people to feed him, groom his fur, clean his teeth and polish his claws. He'd even dispatched people to find a female Wind Tiger across the continent.

Shark Bay was only about five miles away from Scorched Ridge, so even as Link and Celine strolled casually, it only took them half an hour to arrive.

Celine's eyesight was as sharp as an eagle's; she saw a white skeleton lying on the surface of the stone cliff from afar. The skeleton seemed carefree and nonchalant as he lay there, even the Mana it emitted was very faint and weak while the eye sockets were dark and hollow with no signs of the ghostly flames. To put it simply, the skeleton looked exactly as if it was a dead body that had been there for decades and decomposed there.

"Is that him?" asked Celine uncertainly. "Doesn't he look too... laid-back?"

"Yes, that's him," answered Link, nodding. No one else could have such a smooth and



shiny jade-like skeleton.

Once they approached the skeleton, Vance still lay there and made no attempt to get up. The only response he made was lighting up the ghostly flames in his eye sockets, but even then, only faintly.

"Oh, you're here," he said. "You're earlier by a few days than what I'd expected."

"Are you hurt?" asked Link as he stared at him suspiciously.

"Hurt? No!" replied the Lich as he folded his bony hands above his chest. "No, I was bored and had nothing to do, so I lounged around for a bit."

Vance still lay there as if he was never going to get up.

Link furrowed his brows slightly when he heard Vance's response. He could feel a thick sense of apathy from the Lich. If he could fall asleep so calmly on a cliff in the wilderness, wouldn't he sleep for years and years once he'd reclaimed his underground palace?

Link then took out the wand with the Magician's Hand out from his robe and handed it to Vance.

"Here," he said, "it's your wand."

The flames in Vance's eye sockets turned much brighter again, and he sat up and took the wand into his hand. He thought Link's enchantment skills had turned out to be pretty good as he noticed the subtle details on the wand that displayed its exquisite quality.

"Tsk tsk, your basic skills are quite solid," said Vance. "You've even thought to use thorium, that's not a bad material at all. Oh... and the Mana structure is... Ah, wonderful. Quite wonderful!" His tone had become livelier and more impassioned now, and the languidness in his aura was reduced by half.

Vance stood up and tested the new wand by casting a Level-1 dark magic spell called Ball of Decay on the cliff stone. As the Mana fluctuated, a fist-sized gory green orb appeared and hit the surface of the cliff. A buzzing noise followed, and a basketball-sized pit then appeared on the stone surface.

"So, it works very well with dark magic too!" praised Vance immediately. "I must ask, kid, have you learned dark magic before?"

Link shook his head in reply.

"That's not it," said Link. "I've only just come to learn the basics of secret spells from the Master Magician, Eleanor, so I thought I might incorporate it into the wand."

"Ah, no wonder, then," said Vance. "Does it have a name?"

"Gray Flame," replied Link. "Gray to signify its support of secret spells and dark magic. Flame because it is specialized in attacks and offensive spells." In his eyes, these were the strongest aspects of the wand.

Gray Flame

Quality: Epic

Effect 1: The speed of Mana unleashing is increased by 80%.

Effect 2: The attacking power of elemental spells is increased by 60%. The attacking power of secret spells is increased by 80%.

Effect 3: Fixed with one Level-5 spell—the Flaming Hand. (There is a Mana channel in the wand where a small number of dark elements could be mixed into the spell, forming a more powerful attack of the Gray Flaming Hand.)

(Note: This is a gift for the Lich Vance.)

"Excellent," said Vance, very satisfied with his new wand. "It's only slightly less powerful than my original wand." He then turned towards Celine and glanced at her for a few seconds then furrowed his brows.

"A demon Warrior?" he asked.

Compared to the past, Celine had now been able to adapt to this kind of attitude. As long as Link didn't mind her true identity, though, she couldn't care less what other people thought of her. She also had no intention of worrying herself sick about leaving a good impression on those people who treated her with this attitude.

Celine then squinted her eyes and addressed Vance with a menacing tone.

"You might like to know, Lich," she said, "that I am very good at cracking bones."

"Now, now, calm down," said the Lich with a grin. "I was only stating the obvious. I've got no problem with it if Link trusts you." He then clapped his bony hands which made a rattling sound.

"Let's go!" said Vance. "Time is of the essence!"

"You lead the way, then," said Link as he stepped aside.

"No problem," replied Vance. He took a few steps forward then leaped down the cliff. He didn't use any flying spells or even floating spells as he jumped.

Sure enough, three seconds later there was a crackling noise of crunching bones on the white sandy beach down the cliff. Vance had disintegrated into a pile of bones on the ground.

"..."

Link and Celine looked at each other with horror. They couldn't figure out what kind of tricks Vance was playing on them. Did he just commit suicide?

Just then, the scattered bones began to move and gathered together, finally reuniting to form the immortal Lich again. He then climbed up to his feet and waved at them.

"What are you waiting for?" he shouted. "Come on down!"

That was indeed a shocking behavior. Link couldn't figure out why the Lich had to act in such a way. Although his body might be invincible and able to re-form into its original state, would it hurt to cast a simple floating spell? Wouldn't that save more time ultimately?

Anyway, Link didn't think it necessary to bring up the point as Vance had turned out to be fine. He then cast a floating spell on himself and was about to do so on Celine as well when he saw her open up her own wings and jump down the cliff. And so, he followed her and jumped down as well.

Soon, they were all on the beach under the cliff.

"Now we'll just move south along the beach," said Vance, leading the way as Link and Celine followed him from behind. It was going to be a long journey ahead.

"Vance," said Link, "what are your plans once we've reclaimed your underground palace?"

"What else can I do?" answered the Lich. "There's an ice stone coffin in there, so I'm just going to lie down in it and sleep."

"..." Celine found Vance's logic very odd indeed. "If that's all you want to do, then why bother reclaiming the place? Wouldn't anywhere be fine to sleep in?"

"You don't understand," said the Lich with a smile.

Link said nothing, although he felt that he could understand the Lich's reasoning somehow.

This person had once been a mad genius in the past. In his pursuit of the truth, he had tried every method possible without spending a thought for morality or ethics. And yet, he was not an evil person by nature, so he regretted his past crimes. Although he was mad, he had, in fact, lived and survived long into the future.

Still, he was now a Lich and had been imprisoned in the Tower of Azura for more than 400 years. His passions had all been exhausted, and he was now only a ghost of his past self. Dorias had mentioned that he didn't even want to come out of the tower, which meant that this person was not much different from a walking corpse.

Then why did he want to return to the underground palace so badly, though? Could it be to recapture a lost memory? Or was it just because he wanted a safe place to sleep forever? Who knew?

Surprisingly, the Lich smiled and spoke up once again after a period of silence.

"Young lady," he said, "you're right in thinking that I could sleep anywhere. I could sleep right there on that cliff for a hundred years without moving. But there are too many precious things in my underground palace that it would be a waste to just let it rot there. Someone must take them out and use them."

After that, Vance looked at Link and smiled.

"You, boy," he said, "you still lack a proper Mage Tower. But don't worry, once we've got my underground palace under control, you can take anything you want in there. There would be enough in there to help you build a grand Mage Tower. I must advise you not to ask the help of anyone from the East Cove Academy in building it, though. Those Magicians just won't do; they'd waste too many materials. To build the perfect Mage Tower, you must find a High Elf."

Link was speechless as he heard Vance's words. Did the Lich just say he could take anything he wanted from the underground palace and that he was looking for a place to go to sleep? There was something odd in those words; it was almost as if Vance was relaying his last words.

Link couldn't hold his tongue any longer.

"You don't really want to reclaim your underground palace, do you?" he asked.

"Why that's absurd!" answered the Lich with a smile. "Why wouldn't I want to? How can I stand by doing nothing while those barbarians stomp around my palace with their dirty feet?"

Even so, there was still something odd and unconvincing in his voice, as if he was still concealing parts of the truth.

"I feel as if the Lich no longer wants to live," whispered Celine. "How long had he been alive?"

There was lethargy and guilt that Celine could sense clearly from this Lich. It wasn't the kind of urge for relief from suffering that she herself felt from being constantly hunted down and oppressed. Instead, it was an indifference to life that was caused by having lived for too long and experienced too much until all passions and interests had been extinguished and exhausted from the heart.

"He's lived for a thousand years," answered Link with a frown. He'd wanted to ask for Vance's help in guiding him to create a Battle Art that could be practiced by anyone in his troop, but now it seemed his dreams were too big.

"So he's a thousand-year-old Lich..." murmured Celine, stunned by the revelation. "No wonder..."

Meanwhile, Vance waved his hand at the two to urge them to move along.

"Stop chatting and hurry up, both of you!" he shouted. "We're almost there. Those Necromancers aren't that easy defeat!"

Link and Celine said nothing; they just quickened their paces and caught up with Vance. They walked along the beach for about 15 miles until they encountered a big pile of rocks. Vance glanced at it and immediately cast a spell.

"Traceless!"

Traceless

Level-4 Master Spell

Effects: A group invisibility spell that can also almost completely mask the sound and scent of the targets.

(Note: An original spell invented by Vance.)

A sheet of water-like, translucent aura flowed out from Vance's wand and scattered out to enshroud all three of them. In that instant, an outsider looking on would see that they suddenly disappeared into thin air.

"What's going on?" asked Link. He stared at the pile of stones but didn't notice anything suspicious.

Vance then pointed to a black beetle crawling among the heaps of rocks.

"Do you see that bug?" asked Vance.

Link and Celine looked over in that direction and saw a small beetle the size of a thumb. Its outer shell was glowing and very eye-catching, although it was otherwise a common-looking bug. It was seemingly indistinguishable from any other bugs while also not emitting any Mana or magic aura. Had it not been for Vance, Link would definitely walk past it.

"What's wrong with it?" asked Link humbly. In the area of black magic, Vance was definitely a much superior Magician to him.

"This is a Death Beetle created by a secret method," answered Vance. "It's a high-level detecting device used by high-level Necromancers. This looks like a very active beetle;

it can't have been released for more than an hour, which means that there's another guest in my underground palace now."

"What should we do with the beetle?" asked Link.

"Let's just crush it," said Vance. He then turned towards Celine. "Young lady, I need a drop of demon blood for my spell."

# Chapter 198

## This Girl Has an Interesting Bloodline!

Vance needed only one drop of blood. Upon hearing that request, Celine gave it to him without any hesitation. She concentrated her Battle Aura onto her hands and lightly squeezed it. A drop of fresh blood then formed at the tip of the finger.

She acted way too fast. It was too late by the time Link wanted to stop her. Link then sighed as he thought about how Celine was a lot more trusting than him.

If a Level-7 Lich were to ask for a drop of his blood, he would think it through carefully before deciding whether to agree to his request. This act was extremely risky. A drop of blood could be used to play many tricks on the victim in dark magic.

Fortunately, Vance had no ill intentions. Upon getting the drop of blood, he pointed his fingers at the Death Beetle and whispered, "Blood Mist."

The drop of blood flowed towards the beetle and exploded in mid-air into a ball of pale blood-red mist. The beetle was crawling around freely before the mist covered it. However, after it was hit by the mist... it seemed to be unaffected by it at all.

Link and Celine stared at Vance, waiting for him to explain. Both of them had a foundation in magic; it was impossible for them to not notice if the spell had taken effect.

Vance was embarrassed at his failure and scratched his smooth skull with his bony fingers, emitting a screeching sound. After a while, he looked at Celine and said, "Your blood has issues. You are not a pure-blooded demon."

"My mother is a human." Celine nodded. For Vance to have been able to tell this just from a drop of blood was a testament to his strength.

"No, that's not all!" Vance stared at the remaining drop of blood on Celine's fingertips and immediately salvaged it with his fingers and placed it in his mouth.

Following which, he grinded his teeth against one another. After half a minute, Vance



shouted, "How could this be? This is unbelievable! Oh my god!"

Link and Celine exchanged glances as they did not know what would make a thousand-year-old Lich like Vance so agitated.

Vance started circling Celine as he asked, "Celine, do you still remember your mother? What did she look like? What traits did she possess?"

"My mother? She was really pretty and looked quite similar to me. Also, she was very nice to me most of the time. However, she would get angry at me for no reason sometimes. Then... That's all! From what I remembered, she is simply an ordinary lady."

As time passed, when Celine reminisced about her mother, she no longer felt the burning hatred she did for her father. Currently, she merely cherished the memories she once had with her mother. It was not to say that the hatred completely disappeared—it was merely buried deeper as part of her life experiences.

"No, that's not right. She is definitely not an ordinary lady. Your blood possesses an extremely mysterious power. I feel like I have seen it before. Let me think... Damn it. I can't remember! Oh my god, my memory is horrendous. It has been too long."

Vance knocked his skull with full force, creating a loud hollow sound. From the looks of it, it appeared he would only give up after he smashed his skull into smithereens.

Link had to stop him, "Alright, Vance, it is fine. What we have to do now is to deal with this beetle!"

Vance stopped and cast his glance back at Celine, ignoring Link's words. Even though it was only a pair of green flames staring at her, Link could still feel the passion and drive within those eyes.

"Celine, listen to me, you are a miracle! Your blood possesses two extraordinary powers. One of them is extremely pure demonic power, while the other one is an exceptional mysterious force. I cannot pinpoint it, but I am sure you will reach terrifying heights in the future."

Link was slightly surprised as well. He only knew that Celine's father was a powerful figure. However, he did not expect her mother to be so prominent as well.

Celine seemed to be less surprised than expected. She fell silent for a while before turning to Link and said, "I believe this is why my father is so bent on pursuing me despite the countless children he left on the World of Firuman."

Link looked up as though he was reminded of something and said in a serious tone, "Yes, your father probably knew about the truth of your mother's strength."

These two sentences seemed extremely disconnected for people who had no knowledge of Celine's background. Vance then asked, almost in a trance, "What do you mean? Who is Celine's father? If it is such a pure demonic power, I'm afraid he must be a Legendary status individual?"

Link stared at Celine, and upon her approval, Link said, "Celine's father is the Lord of the Deep, Nozamas."

The moment Link mentioned that name, Vance gasped as the cold air shot through his skull, emitting a slight whistling sound. No one knew how he managed to accomplish that with two rows of empty ribcage.

It took Vance three whole minutes to recover from his state of shock. He then stared at Link and spoke with a very serious tone, "I can assure you that once Nozama gets hold of Celine, something terrible will happen. Link, you have to stop this from happening!"

"I will do my best."

"No, not just do your best. There can be no slip-ups. If not for the fact that she is a good-natured girl, I would even suggest that you kill her right now." Vance said these words unapologetically.

Link fell silent upon hearing those words while Celine's face turned a sickly pale. She had realized that she had underestimated her father's determination to seize her all this time.

Would her father have spared if she possessed such value? Would Link have enough time to grow stronger?

She had no idea.

However, this was not what Link was thinking about. He was a lot more optimistic. He

would always deal with the situation at hand first. As for problems that may appear in the future, he would deal with them when they come.

After all, who knew what could happen in the future? For all you might know, your current efforts might be the preparing you for failure.

He pointed at the beetle and told Vance, "It will be fine; let's settle this beetle."

"If we do not have demonic blood, let me think..." Vance started patting his skull again. Sooner or later, a dent would appear in his head.

This time, it only took half a minute. Vance then said, "I have another idea."

Following which, he stuck out his finger and rubbed it onto Celine's crystal blue sword. He immediately shaved off a pile of bone dust. After collecting the dust, Vance threw it in the direction of the beetle and said, "Skeletal Jungle."

These bone dust completely covered the beetle. Eventually, the exterior shell of the beetle was completely covered with a layer of white powder. The spell took effect this time. The beetle immediately began to spin around, while the feelers on its head twitched uncontrollably. It then fell off the stone after a few moments of struggle.

"Alright, this little guy is now blind."

Vance smiled proudly and signaled for Link and Celine to catch up. He then led the way.

After walking for 60 feet, they saw another Death beetle. Vance then skillfully used the same tactic to blind the beetle before he continued forward.

Around 150 feet later, a 15-foot-tall stone appeared right in front of them. An even taller cliff sat behind the stone. Vance then said, "The entrance to the underground palace lies behind this stone. It is filled with deathly spirits and detection spells I placed many years ago. Even my Traceless spell will not be fully effective in that place. We have to be prepared for battle.

"I understand." Link took out his Starcatcher Wand while Celine held her crystal blue sword tightly, leading the way.

They walked around the huge stone and true to Vance's words, they saw a four-foot-

tall and four-foot-wide entrance. They then entered the underground palace, and after walking for 30 feet and making a turn, they saw a ball of mysterious purple light on the walls. Under the illumination of the sinister light, one could see uniform indentations on the walls. Within each of those indentations was a skeleton, standing motionless.

Vance immediately reminded, "Be careful, they are all alive and are Level-3 in strength. Do not disturb them if possible. You will also trigger all the Skeleton Warriors in the area if you awaken one of them."

Celine trod extremely carefully as she was leading the way. Link helped to look out for traps as well, although he had a question, "How about the person who infiltrated just a moment ago? Why didn't he awaken these Skeleton Warriors?"

Vance then whispered, "I'm afraid he knows some high-level infiltration skills. You must know that the best way to deal with Skeleton Warriors is to not awaken them. This is not a very difficult thing to do, especially when they are all low-level undead."

"I understand."

The three of them then moved forward carefully. The deeper they went into the palace, the more spacious the cave. When they reached a depth of around 300 feet, the corridors became 15-foot-tall and 30-foot-wide. The pillars on both sides also became smoother. There were even more lights attached to the walls, providing more illumination.

"Take note; the Security Hall lies ahead. There are some security beasts I created dwelling inside. They are actually undead created from the body parts of many ferocious beasts. You guys might not like the way they look, but do not underestimate their strength! They can go against a Level-5 Warrior head-on!"

While Vance was speaking, the three of them reached the entrance of the Security Hall.

One could already see the security beasts at the entrance. These creatures were not motionless like the Skeleton Warriors. They patrolled the area constantly, completely blocking their way forward.

These security beasts indeed looked very peculiar. Link could clearly see the mouth of a wolf, the claws of a tiger, the tail of a crocodile attached to every one of them. They were formed from the body parts of at least 10 different animals, and the joints

connecting those parts seemed extremely amateur and roughly made. It seemed as though they were merely tied up with a rope. A thick, viscous green substance also dripped from the joints.

Link could not help but comment, "Vance, I have issues with your taste."

Vance then rebutted, "This is not about taste. I must first give priority to the feasibility of these security beasts, and not their aesthetics. After 400 years, the number of security beasts has already been depleted by 90%. There used to be 300 of them roaming around. Now, there are only 30 of them left."

"How should we get past? Do we sneak across, or use brute force?" Celine ask.

"There is no way to sneak across; these creatures are sensitive..."

"Then how did the other fellow get past?" Link asked quizzically.

"That would only mean that that person is a friend of the magic swordsman. He is not their enemy." Vance laid out his hands helplessly as he gave a bitter smile.

Link then stared at the security beasts and estimated their strength. He then said with a worried tone, "There are 30 security beasts around here. That would mean a total of 30 Level-5 Warriors. They are also well-dispersed. It will be difficult to deal with all of them.

"Don't worry, I have already figured it out. Celine and you will block them. You only have to stall them for ten seconds. I will cast a Level-6 control spell to halt their movements..."

"Shh..." Celine interrupted Vance before she positioned her ear in the direction of the Security Hall. She then said, "Listen, someone is speaking. It's getting closer, do you think they are coming out?"

"That is a possibility." Vance was immediately excited.

"Then we will just wait and see," Link smiled as he said.

# Chapter 199

## Let's See Whose Traps Are Better

As the voices got closer and closer, the three of them relied on Vance's Traceless spell to hide silently in the shadows of the hall entrance, patiently waiting. At this moment, they were like hunters lurking in the shadows, ready to lunge and attack the prey at the right moment. After a few seconds, the voices became much clearer. One of them was deep and dark sounding, laced with a hint of anger.

"Get your ass out of here!" said the voice. "Go back and tell your master that unless I die, there is no way he'll get anything from me!"

"That's the bastard Necromancer swordsman that took over my underground palace," whispered Vance. "His name is Dorians, and he's a typical cheapskate!"

The other voice then emerged. This one sounded cold and eerily calm, clearly none too pleased by the other's words.

"Dorians, you must understand," said the other voice, "this isn't a request but an order. If you disobey this order, then you will face the master's wrath! There would be no use for regret then!"

"Your master is nothing but a bandit!" roared Dorians. "Let him come then! I've got so many sturdy Warriors under me; I've got armed beasts, and I've got axe-wielding Warriors! In this underground palace, no one's a master but me!"

The other voice went silent after this outburst by Dorians. Now their footsteps approached Link, and the other two got closer and closer. After about ten seconds, two figures emerged from the entrance.

One of them was very tall—about 7 feet tall. He was wearing a dark purplish-red war armor, and through the faceplate, sat a pair of eyes that were glowing in bluish white light. They were glowing so bright that they seemed to be emitting a five-inch-long light column. His weapon was an extraordinary giant sword, of which the hilt was made into a shape of a demonic goat's head. The goat's eyes were made up of two black crystals which emitted a strong Mana fluctuation.

The other figure was wearing a luxurious black robe, covered by a large hooded cloak. This was the standard attire of a Magician. The figure was also holding an oddly-shaped wand in his hand—its main body was a pure black rod while at the tip of the wand was a small skeleton. A pair of greenish flames were burned in the eye sockets of this small skeleton.

"That Warrior is Dorians," whispered Vance. "He's got a strength of a Level-6 Warrior, and that sword of his was my precious treasure. I called it the Giant Sword of Gloom. Not only is it an impressive slashing weapon, but it's also a magic wand. Its core contains compressed Mana where I stored two spells: one was the Level-5 offensive spell, Soul's Attack, and the other was the Level-4 defensive spell, Crystal Shield."

Vance stared at the Magician in silence for a while to try to identify him.

"I know the other bastard as well," said Vance. "He's called Morestern; he's a Level-7 Voodoo Magician who escaped from the Azura Tower as well. I didn't think he'd find a master so quickly, hahaha."

Link didn't pay much interest in those words but was instead staring keenly at the Magician's skeleton wand. This wand had looked so familiar to him. Link was sure that he'd seen it in the game before, although it might look slightly different from the one in the game. Link had no way of confirming his suspicions, but he knew that there must be something significant about the wand.

"Vance," said Link, "do you recognize the wand in Morestern's hand?"

"The wand?" replied Vance. "Let me see..." Vance then diverted his flaming eyes from the swordsman towards the Magician. After scrutinizing it for about ten seconds, Vance seemed to jump in shock suddenly.

"Link," said the Lich in a perturbed voice, "I'm afraid there's no way we can win this fight today. We should go back for now."

"What do you mean?" Celine asked the exact question in Link's mind.

"I've been too rash!" said Vance as he slapped his head in annoyance. "Morestern has a very powerful wand in his hand. Its full name is the Night's Stare, the Dark Arbiter's Wand. Among all epic-quality wands associated with dark magic, it is definitely one of the top three most powerful wands. Its biggest strength is that it allows the wand holder to instantaneously cast one Level-7 spell per day."

Instantaneous spellcasting? And a Level-7 spell at that?!

Link and Celine stared at each other. They both realized that this meant the opponent could attack and instantly kill at least one of them with only a single move. And if the opponent used Dorians' underlings to trap them in the middle and cast a wide-range attacking spell on them, then Link was sure not even his Dimensional Jump could save them then.

Furthermore, such a small battle wouldn't warrant the use of the highly invaluable White Prophetic Stone. All in all, this powerful opponent was just too much of a hassle to fight, and the best thing they should do now is to escape. They all saw how the two figures were now only about 100 feet away from where they hid; it was their last chance to run.

"Let's hide out in the cave for a while," whispered Link. "Once the Magician's gone, we'll come back and deal with the Swordsman."

"That's the only choice we have," said Vance nodding.

They then started to furtively escape.

But they'd only taken three steps when they noticed the Voodoo Magician stopped dead in his tracks as though he sensed something. He then directed his eyes straight towards the spot where Link and the other two were hiding.

"What's wrong?" asked Dorians impatiently. He hadn't sensed anything yet.

"It's probably nothing," said Morestern. "But I feel as if something is awry." He withdrew his gaze in Link's direction and continued to walk forward.

Only the gods knew how soaked Link and Celine were in cold sweat. They looked into each other's eyes and could clearly see the gratefulness to their luck. Even Vance was so frightened that they could hear his teeth chattering.

The three of them then continued to make for their escape under the cover of Traceless. They moved as fast as possible, even faster than Dorians and Morestern.

Dorians walked Morestern to the entrance of a hall, and they both stopped there.

"Go back and tell your master," said Dorian, "that everything in this cave belongs to



me. He's got no claim on this place. There's no need to send any more messengers here. From now on, we are enemies."

"You'll regret this, Dorians," answered Morestern in a flat tone that showed no trace of emotion at all.

"Ha! Yes, I do regret ever letting you into my underground palace!" retorted Dorians with a cold jeering tone. He then turned around and walked out of view.

Morestern then continued to walk out of the place very slowly, not posing any threat to Link and the rest in their escape. By the time he'd reached the entrance, all three of them had safely hidden behind a giant boulder in a cave almost 200 feet away.

Link, Celine, and Vance had been hiding in the cave for five seconds when Morestern walked out of the entrance and cast a flying spell without any pause or suspicion and flew out towards the sea. Flying spells weren't safe to be used above land where someone might spot you, and so Morestern's direction was quite a normal decision that a Magician would make.

"We're safe now," said Vance. "He's gone. We should go back into the underground palace and deal with Dorians now."

Link had no objections to that, of course. He had no concerns about Dorians now that he'd seen the man. Right now, with the Voodoo Magician gone, Link was certain that the three of them could easily take down the Necromancer and his underlings and reclaim the underground palace.

Still, he felt there was something wrong with the Voodoo Magician. He thought it wouldn't be too great an idea to barge into the underground palace now while Morestern had just been gone a few minutes ago.

"We will eliminate Dorians for sure," said Link. "But I think we should wait for another half an hour, just to be on the safe side. We should wait here and see if there are any more changes next before going in."

Celine agreed with this suggestion. Her gaze was still locked on the direction the Voodoo Magician had flown in.

"To be honest," she said, "I was sure the Voodoo Magician had seen us. That man scares me for some reason."

"Let's wait, then," said Vance with a nod. He didn't actually feel the way Celine did, but he didn't mind waiting. Patience was one of the things you came to possess once you'd lived for a thousand years.

The three of them then waited patiently by the sea. After about ten minutes, Celine saw the figure of a man flying in the sky.

"Someone's up there!" she said pointing upwards. "He's back!"

Link looked up and saw a vague black spot in the sky. The spot quickly approached them, and the outline of the figure was soon clear to his eyes. It was indeed Morestern who had returned after seemingly flying away.

"Tsk tsk, what a sinister fellow!" remarked Vance. "He must've discovered us just now but pretended that he didn't." Vance was counting his luck as he realized that he almost fell into the sly bastard's trap. Had they stormed into the underground palace just now they would've been cornered from the inside of the palace and the outside as well. There was a high chance that all three of them would be dead then.

Soon afterwards, Morestern dropped down at about 300 feet away from the underground palace secret entrance. Link and the other two all noticed how they couldn't detect the slightest Mana fluctuations from Morestern's body. The cunning Magician must've used a camouflage spell or magical gear to mask his own aura and Mana in order to sneak up on them from behind!

Morestern landed on the surface of the sea and walked on the water all the way to the entrance of the underground palace without any stutter in his steps.

Behind the boulder, Vance was thinking of how exciting today had been. Think about it; they are ambushing an ambusher! He felt alive and exhilarated for the first time in literal eons.

"What do we do now?" Vance asked Link. "Do we follow the bastard underground?" He'd now acknowledged Link's extraordinary brains.

"There's no need for that," answered Link, shaking his head. "That man could instantaneously cast a Level-7 spell; if we follow him now, it'd be too risky for us. All we need to do now is to ignite a little fire."

"Ignite a little fire?" asked Vance confusedly.

Celine instantly understood Link's intentions, and this made her grin.

"Dorians and Morestern didn't seem to like each other very much just now," she said. "Dorians didn't lift a finger out of respect for the master, but if he were to see Merstern sneaking back into his underground palace after having seen him off, what do you think he'd do?"

Once Celine put it this way, Vance began to understand what Link meant. He rubbed his smooth skull and sighed.

"Oh, how I feel old," he lamented. "It seems my brain has rusted after such a long dormancy. I don't think I can catch up with you young people!"

Then after considering the matter for a while, Vance suddenly laughed and made a suggestion.

"I'm also a dark Magician like that Morestern, you know," he said. "And my skills and power are on par with him as well. Obviously, I'm the best person among us three to ignite this little fire. You just watch me, kids!"

After speaking, Vance then stealthily sneaked into the underground palace that he had built himself a long, long time ago.

# Chapter 200

## The Start of All Mistakes

Morestern's idea was simple.

He had noticed a few uninvited guests in Dorians' underground palace. His plan was to hide in a safe place while this group of intruders fought Dorians. The best situation would be for both of them to be gravely injured, weakening their battle capabilities. He would then appear and reap all the benefits.

This was a perfect plan!

After casting a high-level Invisibility spell on himself, Morestern slowly crept into an alleyway in the underground palace. This was already his third time passing through his route. He clearly remembered the position of the two skeleton Warriors at the side of the alleyway and skillfully avoided them. Following which, he quickly reached the security hall.

The hall was extremely quiet as Dorians had returned to the depths of the underground palace. In the hall, the security beasts patrolled the area tirelessly, not giving anyone the opportunity to sneak into the palace.

"If the security beasts are still here, it means that they have yet to arrive in this area. Are they a group of cowards that would be discouraged by a minor setback?" Morestern could not understand.

This was strange. A Magician who could cast such an exquisite and delicate concealing spell would definitely have a strong magic foundation. He must at least be a Level-5 Magician. Such people were usually resilient and ambitious; how could they have given up so easily?

"Perhaps I was too early... but that is not possible either. I left almost immediately. If the other party had not given up, they should already be in the palace... This is bad!" He gasped.

Morestern suddenly thought of another terrible possibility. While he had noticed the

presence of his opponents, he had failed to consider that they could have noticed him as well. Similarly, while he had thought of reaping all the benefits without lifting a finger, his opponents also might have predicted his actions.

If this group of intruders was, in fact, waiting for me to enter this palace again... No, I have to get out immediately! Morestern started panicking.

Morestern was a strong and quick-witted Magician as well. In a moment of negligence, he had placed himself in danger. However, the moment he realized something was amiss, his instinctive reaction was to first ensure his safety.

Alas, it was a battle between powerful Magicians. One would lose the entire battle if even one small mistake was made. The possibility of a comeback was close to zero then.

At the moment when Morestern was prepared to leave, he saw a pale purple light ball charging straight towards him from the dark alleyway behind him.

A Level-4 dark magic spell, Shadow Decay! Morestern was shocked by this sudden attack and immediately cast a defensive spell in response. Three dark green light spheres then appeared and started spinning at high speed around his body. This then created transparent ripples which made use of the three light balls as nodal points to create a light dome.

Defensive Spell: Three-Sided Barrier

Level-4 spell

Cost: 410 Points.

Effect: Creates a strong barrier that can defend against physical, elemental and mystic attacks.

(Note: Morestern's pride and joy)

Vance and Morestern were both Level-7 Magicians. In the current Firuman Continent, this was almost as powerful as one could get. Furthermore, they were both monsters who had lived for countless years. The moment they cast spells, it usually would not be a spell lower than Level-4. They could also cast all of them instantaneously, making them extremely formidable foes.

However, Morestern was once again caught off guard.

The Shadow Decay spell that Vance had cast made a sharp turn at the last moment and exploded in the alleyway behind Morestern.

A huge explosion sound could be heard, as the dark purple miasma dispersed in all directions.

Morestern was completely dumbfounded.

Hmm? The security beasts all stopped in their tracks and turned towards the door in the hall.

In that direction stood Morestern. While the Three Sided Barrier on his body was not emitting a strong glow, it was eye-catching enough in the dark underground chamber.

The security beasts immediately let out a wolf-like howl and charged towards Morestern. It was a terrifying sight to see over 30 Level-5 Warriors charging straight towards you. Despite Morestern being a Level-7 Voodoo Magician, he was slightly flustered.

He knew that his opponents were not merely these beasts. There was a strong dark Magician that was still hiding in the shadows. Furthermore, the magic swordsman Dorians would also prove to be quite troublesome.

"This is bad!" Morestern gasped. He realized he was caught in a trap.

He did not have much time to think. The security beasts were charging at top speed. He only had around one second to think of the best alternative before he would taste the wrath of their sharp claws and ferocious jaws. Morestern then raised his staff and pointed it towards these beasts, "Enhanced Cobweb!"

Enhanced Cobweb

Level-4 Spell

Cost: 290 Points

Effect: Creates an extremely adhesive cobweb. It is a very strong restrictive spell.

The web was flung towards the beasts much like a fisherman casting his net. It did not take much effort for Morestern to trap all the beasts in his restrictive spell. The accuracy and spellcasting speed was a true testament to Morestern's strength as a Level-7 Magician.

This was indeed a powerful spell. Although it was only Level-4, its adhesive effects were incredible. Once someone was trapped in the web, the speed of their movements would be greatly reduced. It would be a miracle if anyone could move three feet forward within a second while under the effects of this spell.

Now that he was temporarily out of danger, Morestern heaved a sigh of relief. He did not continue his assault on the beasts as he was still wary of his opponents, who were still hiding in the shadows.

This was way too dangerous. He had to retreat.

As he retreated, Morestern remained extremely vigilant. As long as he felt a threat to his safety, he would immediately locate his opponent and cast his wide-ranged instantaneous Level-7 spell without hesitation. After around 30 feet, Morestern still could not locate his opponent. The Magician seemed to be like a phantom, disappearing right after they fired that Shadow Decay spell at him.

Damn it! This was their plan right from the start! To get me trapped! This was the thing Morestern was most worried about.

At that time, a ferocious roar came from the depths of the palace, "Who is the one making a ruckus in my palace!"

It was Dorians' voice. This was followed by the sound of rapid and heavy footsteps. At the same time, the walls in the palace started glowing with a slight magical light, illuminating the area. There was now nowhere to hide.

Apart from that, the skeleton warriors who were lying dormant within the walls of the palace had also been awakened. Their eyes shone with a bloody sinister glow and, they walked out of the walls with swords in their hands, blocking Morestern's path of retreat.

Furthermore, Morestern also realized that a ghostly blue hue was covering the exit of the underground palace. He knew from a glance that this was a Level-7 area sealing spell, Shadow Fortress. The appearance of this area sealing spell had pushed

Morestern to his limits.

At that moment, Dorians appeared in the security hall. He was accompanied by Warriors clad in a black body armor who held a giant black axe in their hand.

They were Dorians' prided Black Axe Fighters. The average strength of the Axe Fighters was Level-5. There was even a third of them who had reached Level-6!

If an army of such strength appeared in the Norton Kingdom, it would be enough to cause a huge ruckus. However, Dorians clearly did not want to be in the spotlight. His life goal was simple. He merely wanted to stay in the underground palace together with his vast wealth. Whoever dared to disrupt his peaceful life and riches would be his mortal enemy!

The moment he saw Morestern, he furiously bellowed, "Morestern, I did not think you would be the one! You despicable thief!"

"This is a misunderstanding; listen to me!" Morestern tried to explain.

"There is no misunderstanding! I only trust what I see. This time, you have angered me. Be prepared to taste my wrath!" A strong dark aura emanated from Dorians as he saw his security beasts being trapped in the cobweb.

He then raised the dark elemental sword in his hand and pointed it accusingly at Morestern, "Warriors, slice him to bits!"

Gwwahhhh! The Axe Fighters roared and charged towards Morestern. They adopted a dispersed formation to reduce their susceptibility to spells.

"Damn savages!" Morestern was enraged as well. He knew that explaining himself would be futile now. He could only depend on his own strength.

He raised his staff and waited till the Axe Fighters reached the golden distance for his spellcasting range before he shouted, "Corrosive Nova!"

Corrosive Nova

Level-7 spell

Cost: 3200 Points



Effect: With the caster as the center of the spell, this releases three bursts of extremely corrosive energy within one second. This spell has a certain impact to it and can blow off any obstacles it encounters along the way.

(Note: Morestern's killer spell!)

The spell was not one that was exceptionally flashy. Three green, light circles emerged from Morestern and gradually expanded in all directions.

However, the offensive power of this spell was insane.

With Morestern as the center of the destruction, everything within a 180 feet radius was immediately blown in all directions. As the targets were in mid-air, they would be corroded and disintegrated by the corrosive power of the spell. By the time they reached the ground, they would already be reduced to a pile of white dust.

The skeleton warriors and the security beasts were the first to suffer direct annihilation. The Black Axe Fighters then followed, as the spell instantly destroyed over 30 of them. The remaining ten over Axe Fighters had noticed something was amiss and immediately retreated, narrowly escaping death.

As the three corrosive magical waves subsided, Morestern looked at the piles of white dust on the floor with pride. He then stared coldly at Dorians, "Warrior, do you really think you are strong? You are nothing more than ants in my eyes."

Dorians was indeed shocked at this outburst of offensive power. He was glad that he did not charge forward impulsively. However, he then laughed, "How many Level-7 spells can you cast? I am sure you are almost out of mana points by now."

As he sniggered, he commanded the remaining ten Axe Fighters, "Kill him!"

The Black Axe Fighters charged forward without a shred of fear in their hearts.

Dorians did not attack. He merely went back to the depths of the palace. He was not retreating but calling out his triumph card. The most terrifying force in this palace was not Dorians, nor was it the Black Axe Fighter. It was something that usually hid itself in the depths of the underground palace—an extremely powerful being that Dorians could never hope to match up to.

As he left, Dorians took a good look at the powerful Magician as he whispered,

"Morestern, prepare to meet your death!"

Morestern gritted his teeth as he looked behind him. The area sealing spell, Shadow Fortress was still present. It had only been slightly weakened by the offensive power of the Corrosive Nova spell, causing the light to dim a little.

He also had no time to be concerned over the spell. The Black Axe Warriors were now only 90 feet away and were about to release their Battle Aura.

Morestern cursed, "Damn! That's too many things to deal with."

Under the effects of the Shadow Fortress, he was unable to use his transportation spells. It seemed like he was destined to stay behind.

However, Morestern still had the pride of a Level-7 Magician. Despite knowing that it was the end, he did not give up.

Twenty Black Axe Fighters would not be enough to defeat me.

As this thought flashed through his mind, the fastest three Black Axe Fighters had already started charging towards him. They also raised the giant axes in their hands which were now enveloped in a black aura. They seemed to be putting in all their power into this attack.

Morestern was prepared. He immediately pointed his staff at his attackers and hollered, "Get out!"

Level-4 spell, Single-Directional Blast!

A huge force exploded right in front of the three Black Axe Fighters. The timing of this spell was also perfect, exploding at the time when the fighters were at the peak of their charging speed, which incidentally, was also when their sense of balance was at their worst.

They were immediately flung in the opposite direction as the Battle Aura from their axes exploded towards the ceiling. That was not all. While they were flung backwards, they also crashed into many of their other comrades, hitting ten other fighters along the way.

As a Level-7 Voodoo Magician, Morestern was adept at cursing others from the

shadows. However, this did not mean that his combat skills were to be trifled with. After all, he had lived for hundreds of years and had developed many Supreme Magic Skills. He would not be an easy foe even in direct combat.

"What a bunch of dumb savages!" Morestern said as he stared at the tumbling Black Axe Fighters. He then started putting all his focus into destroying these muscle-minded creatures.

Outside the underground palace, Vance could be seen retreating right after casting that Shadow Decay spell.

As the three of them felt the strong magical fluctuations coming from the underground palace, they looked at each other in awe.

"This Voodoo Magician is really powerful!" Link commented.

"A bit on the dumb side though," Celine laughed.

"He is actually a very intelligent person. He merely made one mistake. However, if he is still getting entangled with Dorians' Warriors, then he would have made a second mistake." Vance smiled as he rubbed his chin with his slender skeletal fingers.

"Why do you say so?" Link was curious.

Vance gloated, "Apart from the security beasts, there is also a magic puppet in my underground palace. In order to create this puppet, I spent nearly 20 years and an insane amount of materials. In essence, it is a perfect combat machine. Even I will not be able to defeat it."

Link and Celine stared at each other as they mourned for Morestern in silence.

# Chapter 201

## The Invincible Magic Puppet (Part 1)

Thud!

The last of the axe-wielding Warriors finally fell. He was dead before he even hit the ground. Morestern heaved a long sigh of relief and reached his hand out to pull down the hood of his tattered cloak. Just then, a bone cracked and the body that had been attacked by the axe of a Warrior earlier almost collapsed to the ground.

"Ah, it's time to find a new body," said Morestern.

This wouldn't be a big problem to him though, as he had killed almost all of Dorians' men. Once he got out of here, he'd just find a safe place to rest for a while then come back once he'd recovered slightly and kill Dorians. Then, the underground palace would be his.

This turned out to be quite out of my expectations, Morestern thought.

He looked around at the corpses strewn all across the ground and couldn't help but feel proud of himself. He hadn't been out for hundreds of years; who would've thought that he'd still be on top of his game?

After a short rest, Morestern then walked towards the exit and was prepared to get out of the underground palace. The Shadow Fortress was still active, but it wouldn't be any problem for him to cancel it now, as there wouldn't be anyone else in here to pose any threat to him.

The Mana in his body was close to depleted now, so Morestern took out a bottle of fluorescent potion and swallowed it in one gulp. It was a high-level Mana potion which was highly effective in replenishing a body that was almost out of Mana back to its full capacity. He then lifted his wand and directed the Mana towards the skeleton at the tip of his wand and caused a huge Mana fluctuation to appear in the passageway.

Morestern was about to use the remaining Mana in his body to cast the Level-7 attacking spell in his wand to deactivate the Shadow Fortress. But just as the

spellcasting process reached halfway, a thought emerged in Morestern's mind which made him pause.

If those people who were lying in wait for me are outside, he thought, then wouldn't it be suicide for me to use the Level-7 spell now?

Once he thought about it, Morestern gritted his teeth and decided to sit down inside here instead of going out. He knew that there were three people waiting to attack him, and one of them was a powerful dark magic Magician who was actually inside this underground palace. Meanwhile, Dorians' underlings had all been eliminated, so there was only Dorians left to deal with.

His body was weak now, so it wouldn't be a good idea to fight Dorians. The best plan for him was to just wait here quietly and recover his strength and not arouse Dorians' suspicion so he wouldn't come out.

As he thought of this, Morestern closed his eyes and entered into a half-conscious meditative state to accelerate his body's healing rate.

But just then, he heard footsteps coming from the depths of the underground palace.

Tap... tap... tap...

The footsteps were light and regular, and they didn't sound that fast.

Morestern was naturally stunned. He opened his eyes immediately and saw a skinny figure walk out of the big entrance. The shadowy figure was about five feet and six inches tall. The figure's silhouette seemed quite slim and feminine; the only pity was that her chest was too flat. Morestern could now discern that she was wearing a long dress that was covered in shiny scales, while in her hand she was holding a four-foot-long sword. When he looked at her face again she noticed that her skin was as smooth and fair as porcelain, and her features almost flawless. The dark black eyes shone with beguiling charm... ah, this was indeed a true beauty!

"You are...?" Morestern asked in a daze.

He wasn't one to be so easily fooled by someone's outward appearances, of course. This young woman in front of him was indeed beautiful, but strangely enough, he couldn't sense any Life Aura from her at all. Neither did her body emit a Mana fluctuation. In other words, she was no different from a non-living lump of rock.

The young woman's face showed no trace of emotion as she walked towards Morestern in her neither-fast-nor-slow pace. Once she was about 160 feet away from him, she suddenly spoke up.

"Target: Voodoo Magician. Height: five feet, eight inches. Body weight: 150 pounds. Strengths: secret spells. Threat level: two stars."

"...?" Morestern didn't catch all of what she said and just sat there dumbstruck by it all. Still, he was prepared to unleash an attack the moment he was sure this young woman was going to be a threat to him.

He activated a three-phase barrier, then lifted his wand and pointed it towards the young woman and chanted, "Elemental Collapse!"

A water-like translucent sheet of Mana then shot towards the strange young woman.

Ding!

The body of the young woman suddenly became blurred, and she bent backwards until her body was almost horizontal as she escaped the attacks of the Elemental Collapse with unimaginable speed.

She can't be that fast! Morestern thought, although he didn't seem to panic at all. If this woman could dodge an attack from a focused-range spell, then how about trying to dodge his wide-range attack?

"Spiderweb!" Morestern decided to slowly toss the web this time just to gauge her speed.

The moment the white light of the spell appeared, Morestern suddenly discovered that the young woman disappeared!

"Where did she go?" remarked the flummoxed Morestern.

Then, he felt a cool sensation on his forehead as if something cold was piercing through his skull. At the last moment, he saw the beautiful face of the young woman right in front of him. The last image he saw in his mind was that of those clear, charming eyes of hers.

How is this possible? Why didn't my protective barrier work?

Those were the last thoughts in Morestern's head. He was dead immediately afterwards, and the Spiderweb that he cast collapsed with him.

"Mission completed. Threat eliminated," said the young woman. Her voice was as pure and innocent as a lark's. She then turned around and walked back into the underground palace.

Tap... tap... tap...

She kept a leisurely pace as she walked, as if she was just enjoying an afternoon stroll in the park.

Ba-dump!

Morestern's body slumped to the ground. He was dead, dead at the hands of a nameless opponent.

...

Outside the underground palace.

"Morestern is dead," Vance suddenly said. He had been following the situation inside the underground palace closely all along.

He'd left several detecting runes inside earlier, and these runes were telling him that the powerful Level-7 Voodoo Magician's Life Aura had been completely extinguished.

"Was he killed by the magic puppet?" asked Link.

Vance nodded his head. "I think so," he said. "If these runes aren't mistaken, there should only be two fighters left in the underground palace. One is Dorians, and the other is the magic puppet."

"Can we storm inside now?" asked Celine.

"Any time now," answered Vance. Vance glanced at the direction of the underground palace and saw that Morestern's Shadow Fortress was still there. "It takes Mana energy to sustain the Shadow Fortress. Now that Morestern's dead it should collapse soon. We should wait here for a while."

Link took the opportunity to ask Vance a question that had been bugging his mind.

"The magic puppet of yours seems quite powerful," he said. "Tell me more about it."

"Well, of course she's powerful!" exclaimed Vance with visible pride in his expressions. "She's called Nana. Her body was made with Gibb's Gold which can withstand extremely high and low temperatures. She's as close to indestructible as is physically possible. The magic seal on her body was made with thorium gold which is the best Mana conductor in the world. I'd also put 1028 units of Solon memory magic seal in her brain so she could learn from combat experience and evolve so she must've gotten stronger..."

"Wait, wait, wait a second," interjected Celine. "I didn't get most of what you just said there. Can't you use plainer words?"

"Alright, then," said Vance. "There are two things that are her strongest points. Firstly, her speed, her extreme speed. She usually likes to walk at a strolling pace, but when she needs to, she can accelerate her speed up to an explosive point and move at a quarter mile per second."

Celine gulped at the revelation. She was now a Level-6 Warrior and could be considered as one of the best Warriors on the continent. But even if she were to spread out her wings and dive down from the sky, her speed couldn't be any faster than a tenth of a mile per second. That meant that she was still four times slower than Nana!

Even Link was stunned and incredulous.

"But that's faster than the speed of sound!" he exclaimed. "Are you sure you didn't exaggerate this?"

"I did no such thing!" said Vance, looking even more proud of his creation now. "In fact, that was her speed 400 years ago! Don't forget that Nana can improve and evolve, so to be frank, even I'm not sure how far she's advanced now. Which is why I must remind you, Celine, that you must only be on the defensive with her, never attempt to attack her!"

Celine rolled her eyes at the Lich's remarks. She's not so foolish or insane to ever attempt to attack a monster with such a speed. Not unless she wanted to die, anyway!

"What's her second strength, then?" asked Link.



"Her second greatest strength was attacking the opponent's weakest point," said Vance. For fear that the two couldn't understand the technical terms, Vance used his bony finger to draw a very simple magic seal on the ground.

"Look at this," he said. "This is the Level-0 defensive spell, Basic Shield. When the spell is cast, a light shield will appear around the caster's body. Isn't that right?"

Both of them nodded their heads.

"Viewed on the surface," continued Vance, "this light shield seems smooth and uniform, but in truth, there will be some points on the shield where it is much weaker than the other points... Do you follow?"

Celine frowned as she couldn't understand much of it. Her knowledge in spell foundation was not her strongest suits. Link, on the other hand, nodded keenly, although his brows were still furrowed.

"The points of different strengths do indeed exist," he said, "but they are usually unstable and don't exist for long. Every weak point can only last for as long as ten microseconds. How can Nana ever utilize this point?"

Vance nodded his head at Link's question.

"The fact that her speed can reach a quarter of a mile per second," he began to explain, "proves that she has an extremely fast reaction speed. In truth, 400 years ago, her reaction speed had reached 0.002 seconds. In other words, two microseconds."

"That fast?" asked Link, completely astounded.

After coming to this world, Link's most powerful advantage had been his terrifying thinking speed. He'd once measured that his limit was around one microsecond, and he couldn't sustain that kind of thinking speed for longer than two seconds. Yet now, he'd met a human-made puppet whose reaction time was almost as fast as his own! He must concede at this point that Vance truly was a genius who should be very proud of his inventions.

"Link," said Celine, "I think I'm a little frightened by this." Although she didn't actually understand the specifics of this puppet's strengths, she still felt that the reaction speed of two microseconds and the moving speed of a quarter of a mile per hour were just too staggering to think of.

She would have no hope to fight against or even defend herself against someone with such speed. She might even get killed within a second and not even know what hit her!

"Don't worry," said Link after thinking about it for a moment. "I'll protect you from behind."

There were three of them, and one of them was a Level-7, thousand-year-old Lich who was also the magic puppet's creator. There was no reason why they couldn't defeat a single magic puppet, was there? Link's own reaction time was also dangerously quick too, so he should be able to protect Celine without a problem.

"Alright, then," said Celine. She knew that Link would never give her empty promises, so now that he'd given her his word, she was finally relieved.

Just then, the faint blue light in the underground palace flashed ever so slightly—the Shadow Fortress had collapsed.

"It's time," said Vance. "Let's go."

Once again, Vance cast Traceless on all three of them and led the other two into the underground palace. Celine gripped at her blue crystal sword tightly and followed behind the Lich closely. Link was the last one to enter behind Celine. All three were highly focused as they prepared to fight against the invincible magic puppet.

# Chapter 202

## The Invincible Magic Puppet (Part 2)

Underground Palace.

After walking for around 150 feet, they saw a body on the ground which had its arms severed.

"It's Morestern." Vance whispered.

Celine quickly squatted down to observe the injuries on the Voodoo Magician's body. After glancing up and down, she could not help but gasp, "What fast attacking speed!"

From the shape and depth of the wound on Morestern's forehead, Celine, who was a swordsman, could accurately determine the terrifying attacking speed of the magic puppet. It was a level that she could only hope to reach.

Meanwhile, Vance and Link were observing the magic traces left on the scene.

Vance pinched the piles of white dust on the ground and cooed, "This old guy seemed to have cast a Corrosive Nova spell before he died. From the residual magic fluctuations, this spell was released extremely quickly. I estimate the total casting time to be only around 0.2 seconds. The Dark Arbiter is really a powerful wand."

Link pointed to a set of footprints on the side and said, "This small footprint was probably left by the magic puppet."

Vance looked over and nodded. "That's right. Nana's image is that of a 17-year-old girl... Don't think of it that way! The only reason why I used this image was to bewitch the opponents!"

Link shrugged his shoulders and decided not to comment on that decision. He continued to observe the traces on the ground. After a few minutes, he said, "After the magic puppet killed Morestern, she left immediately. After around half a minute, Dorians appeared again. He came right over here... This should be the place where the wand was. He picked it up and left."

Link then switched an angle to view the traces as he continued, "From the footprints on the ground, there were two outbursts of power. The first one was here, where the puppet moved horizontally for three feet, and her attack was dodged; one Elemental Disintegration spell was released. She then started fighting back."

Link spoke as though he had witnessed the battle scene first hand, explaining along the way. Link then walked up beside Morestern's body. He saw a white gelatinous substance and dabbed his finger in it. After taking a sniff, he continued, "When the magic puppet retaliated, Morestern was just about to release the Cobweb spell. Vance, how fast do you reckon Morestern actually needs to cast this spell?"

Vance knew that Link was estimating the power of the magic puppet and was hence willing to cooperate. He observed the white substance and said, "I have seen him cast this spell once. He was extremely fast. This level of completion should have taken less than 0.1 seconds."

"Less than 0.1 seconds? That is too vague. I need it to be more specific," Link pressed.

Vance thought back on what he saw and reported an accurate number, "0.08 seconds should be about right."

Link then measured the distance between the two outbursts of power and frowned. He then said, "The distance between the two footprints is 150 feet. If the magic puppet had attacked while Morestern was casting the spell, her speed could be estimated to be at a terrifying 2000 feet per second. Vance, you were totally right, this magic puppet has evolved greatly."

Celine was horrified, "If we consider the starting step and the landing action, her top speed would be much greater than 2000 feet per second. This is insane!"

This outburst of energy was comparable to a short distance teleportation spell.

Vance gave a bitter smile and said, "Nana seems to have exceeded my expectations. What do we do now?"

Vance was not confident in going against such fast reaction and attacking speed. He would be courting death! Not to mention how embarrassing it actually was to be defeated at the hands of his own creation.

Celine turned to look at Link.

Link stayed silent. From the current data they had, he quickly calculated the power limit of the magic puppet. After around three minutes, he said, "It will be a bit tough, but we still stand a chance. For example, when traveling at such a high speed, she will not be able to change directions. This can be seen from the battle traces."

To change directions while traveling at 2000 feet per second would generate a huge centripetal force that would put great pressure on the magic puppet's body. Even if her body were hardy enough to withstand such pressure, the ground beneath her feet wouldn't be able to provide enough friction to make the direction change. This was not merely dependent on the power of the magic puppet, but also the environmental restrictions.

He looked at Celine and said, "Give me the bracelet; I have to make some alterations to this spell."

The bracelet contained a Level-5 Crimson Edelweiss spell. As the creator of this spell, Link naturally had a good understanding of this spell. He was extremely clear that this spell also contained a magic inflection point which would last around 0.06 seconds. This was sufficient time for the magic puppet to deliver a fatal blow. In order to ensure Celine's safety, he had to compress the duration of the magic inflection point to within 0.01 seconds.

Celine handed her defensive bracelet over to Link. Link then sat down on a piece of rubble and took out the best material he had brought with him, the Fire Star Thorium, before he started to replace the ordinary Thorium in the bracelet with this high-quality material. The process was extremely fast and could be done with a simple replacement spell. It merely took ten minutes. Following which, Link used a Higgs Field spell to carefully repair the tiny flaws in the bracelet. As time was tight previously, he did not polish this bracelet to his usual standards. He originally thought that no one in the world would be able to take advantage of such minor flaws. However, now that this puppet had appeared, he would have to defend against it.

The entire bracelet had around five flaws. Although they were all inconspicuous alone, their effects would stack and render the eventual Crimson Edelweiss spell imperfect. Ordinary people would not be able to feel any difference between the two. However, a strong Magician would be able to tell simply from the magic fluctuations that was emanating from the bracelet.

After Link completely refined the bracelet, Vance, who was observing the whole time,

could not help but applaud, "This bracelet is beautiful!"

Link smiled and put the bracelet on Celine's wrist. The previous bracelet he gave Celine was around the same quality as the Dragon's bracelet he gave Eleanor. However, the quality of the bracelet now was much higher than that.

"Now, I do not have to worry about the magic puppet breaking through the magic inflection point," Link mentioned as he held Celine's smooth and soft hands. Link did not wish to let go of it as he caressed it gently.

Celine merely smiled and did not pull her hand back.

Link then turned towards Vance while holding her hand. "Instant spellcasting requires complete focus. There can be no distractions in your heart nor any fluctuations in mood. Only then can flawless spells be released."

"I'll do my best."

Vance rubbed his smooth skull and suddenly lacked confidence. It was simply enough for a thousand-year-old monster like himself to feel no distractions in his heart. However, for one to have no fluctuations in mood... As long as one was still alive, that would be almost impossible to do during combat! This request was fundamentally anti-human!

Now that the preparations had been done, the success of their mission would depend entirely on their reaction on the spot.

"Alright, let's enter."

The three of them progressed forward.

As they passed through the security hall, a long and winding corridor appeared. There were magnificent statues on both sides of the corridor, and the ground was made entirely of black jade. It was a sight to behold.

"This is what an underground palace should feel like," Link said with a smile.

"This is merely the beginning," Vance spoke with pride.

As they walked along the corridor, they could feel that they were walking along a slight

upwards slope which brought them higher towards ground level. After two whole rounds, a huge copper door appeared right in front of them. The door was at least 30 feet in height and 24 feet wide. Glorious scenes where the God of Light created the world were inscribed on both sides of the door, giving the door an intense historical and epic presence.

Celine was pleasantly surprised at the sight, as she stared at Vance once more. "I did not think that you had such good taste."

Link agreed.

Vance felt extremely satisfied.

The door was left ajar, and they passed through it without any obstructions. Behind the door, was an extremely spacious hall that was more than 2000 square feet. The ground was carved out of obsidian, and in order to maintain the stability of the hall, 20 thick pillars each the width of two adults were built. Similarly, intricate statues were carved into each of these pillars for aesthetic purposes.

The three of them progressed, using the pillars as cover. After around 60 feet, they heard voices in front of them.

"Master, is this fine?"

From the voice, one could easily tell that it was magic swordsman Dorians.

But wasn't he the master of the underground palace? How could there be another one? Who exactly was this master? The three of them were puzzled.

At that moment, a crisp voice sounded.

"Joint magic rune lubricated level 89%, beneath expectations. Number two, restart!"

"Yes, Master." Dorians voice once again sounded as brushing sounds followed.

As they listened to the conversation, an incredulous look overcame all of their faces. They had gotten it wrong the whole time. Dorians was never the master of this palace. This true master of the palace was the magic puppet, while Dorians was merely her servant. It suddenly all made sense. How could Dorians face a Level-7 Magician without any fear, and why he would be such a cheapskate and be willing to stay in this

palace despite being a strong magic swordsman?

The thing that was keeping him here was not the wealth, but the magic puppet!

Link then looked at Vance. "Nana is your creation. Why is it not listening to you?"

Vance helplessly laid out his hands and said, "I have no idea as well. Four hundred years ago, Nana was merely a magic puppet that I created. How could I know that things would turn out like this?"

"Then, can you still give her an order?" Link asked.

Celine also looked at Vance expectantly. As long as there was a chance for her to avoid battling with this magic puppet, she would take it.

Vance said regrettably. "I'm afraid not. I don't look like who I was 400 years ago at all. Furthermore, before I was imprisoned, I had set Nana into a state of slumber. Now that she has awakened, I'm afraid that something must have happened."

Four hundred years was a long time. It was true that many things could have changed.

Link took a deep breath before saying, "Then I guess there is no other way. Let's do this. I will commence the ambush while Celine helps me defend against any unprecedented attacks."

"Got it." Celine stood in front of Link as she spoke with resolve.

Link then started concentrating his mana. He was about to cast the Level-6 Titan's Hand spell.

Link could cast the spell in 0.5 seconds. This was already considered an extremely fast speed. However, the moment he started concentrating mana, the magic fluctuations broke through the veil of their concealing spell. Nana's voice then echoed through the hall.

"Intruder alert! Threat level: 3 stars!"

Following which, a young girl with an exquisite appearance and huge, clear eyes appeared.



Celine was extremely cautious of Nana. The moment she saw Nana, she instinctively activated her Level-6 bloodline spell, Obsidian Shield. This spell was extremely special, as it would not interfere with other spells that were being cast at the same time. Furthermore, it could also be activated instantly. After activating this spell, Celine then triggered the Crimson Edelweiss spell. Link had given the bracelet a mana retention ability which allowed mana to be stored and thus allowed the spell to be cast instantaneously whenever Celine willed. Hence, within 0.1 seconds, the Level-6 Obsidian Shield was covered by another Level-5 crimson forcefield.

The moment these two spells took form, Nana's attack arrived.

A figure appeared right in front of the Crimson Edelweiss spell. She rushed into the forcefield, ignoring the burning heat from the forcefield. Although the heat seemed to have no effect on her, the forcefield seemed to have lowered her speed greatly.

However, her speed was still fast by normal standards. The dagger in her hands then struck like a venomous snake, piercing through the Edelweiss spell before piercing through Celine's second layer of defense, the Obsidian Shield. It was about to hit Celine's body anytime soon.

This was not an attack that took advantage of the weak points in the spell. Nana merely used brute force to break through two high-level defensive spells.

Link was horrified. How can she have such destructive offensive power!

# Chapter 203

## The Invincible Magic Puppet (Part 3)

Nana's speed was ridiculously fast. Even with the combined protection of Crimson Edelweiss and the Black Crystal Shield, it would still be difficult for Celine to effectively defend herself.

She did not step backwards because Link was behind her, which would mean that it would inevitably put him in a very dangerous situation. Her only choice was to move slightly sideways in the hopes that she could avoid the brunt of the impact herself.

This confrontation happened within a fraction of a second. Even Vance's reaction time was too slow to do anything, as Mana was still stuck in his Gray Flame wand and the spell just wouldn't form quick enough.

It wasn't that Vance's spellcasting was too slow, it was just that Nana's speed was too terrifyingly fast!

The same was true of the Necromancer swordsman. When Nana and Celine clashed, he was a hundred feet away from them and hadn't even had time to pull out his sword yet.

The only one there who could make any meaningful response was Link.

Seeing that Celine was in danger, Link's heart suddenly beat much faster. The next moment, the world around him began to slow down—he was now entering the state of absolute calm that allowed him to cast spells at an ultra-high speed. In this state, anything that had nothing to do with the immediate surroundings of the battlefield was cast out of Link's mind. All he could see now and be focused on was Nana and the sword in her hand.

The sword advanced inch by inch towards Celine. It encountered the Black Crystal shield on its way, and at such a high speed, the shield acted like a real crystal; it broke on contact with the sword, and fragments of the shield scattered about a quarter of an inch before they evaporated and dissipated into dark elements.

Link could now see Nana's sword very clearly. He didn't know what material it was made of, but its blade was dark blue, and there was a thin blue electric arc hovering on the surface of the sword. Once the electricity made contact with any kind of shield, the shield would be rendered completely useless.

There are still 0.05 seconds left before the tip of the sword touches Celine's body, Link thought. I still have time!

At this point, Link had cast the Titan's Hand, and under his precise control, the giant fiery hand made up of pure fire elements quickly went around Celine's body and grasped the magic puppet Nana in its clutches. When the giant hand had wrapped around half of Nana's body, a thought suddenly occurred in Link's head—she's resistant to extreme temperatures!

Once he thought of this point, Link promptly changed his plans. He'd originally set the fiery hand to stretch out and grasp Nana, but now he directed the giant hand to clench into a fist and take the form of the Fist of Firomoz and increase the speed to its maximum limit to punch Nana from the side.

Link had calculated that this blow would send Nana flying right before the edge of her sword hit Celine's body! Unfortunately, in the next moment, the magic puppet Nana responded to Link's attacks; she suddenly pulled back the sword that was about to pierce Celine. Now, without the force field of Edelweiss and the Black Crystal Shield in the way, her sword moved at an impossibly fast speed. In a fraction of a second, it struck the Titan's Hand.

Nana's short sword then pierced through the Titan's Hand and immediately Link could feel that he'd lost control over the fire elements in the spell and the fiery hand began to explode.

She didn't attack the weakest point in my spell, Link realized. She directly attacked the critical point in the Mana structure and shattered the stability of the spell instantly. She's evolved much further than Vance expected!

Although this could be considered as attacking the weakest point, Nana's move just now was almost ten times more powerful than any magic spell. When this kind of attack was coupled with her high resistance towards extreme heat, Nana had turned out to be a Magician's arch nemesis!

Link watched helplessly as the fire elements in the Titan's Hand began to collapse and explode, while Nana had pulled back her sword and once again thrust it towards Celine.

But this time, Celine had gotten enough time to respond. She raised up her Blue Crystal sword and assumed the defensive stance.

Still, she could only block Nana's sword. Celine could only rely on her solidified Battle Aura to protect her from the exploding fire elements from the Titan's Hand as both the Crimson Edelweiss and the Black Crystal shield had both been destroyed.

The Titan's Hand was a Level-6 spell, and the force of the explosive fire elements from this spell was no weaker than a full force Level-4 Flaming Blast. If Celine were to be struck by the brunt of the impact from the explosion, her Battle Aura would surely be depleted. It might even send her flying, leaving an opportunity for Nana to pursue and attack her.

Link must not let the Titan's Hand explode!

The moment that thought popped up in his head, Link activated the Soul's Glyph and his Level-5 Vulcan's Hand began to take form. Within a microsecond, Link used one of his Supreme Magical Skills, Machine Gun to transform the Vulcan's Hand's spell structure using Mana resonance. Combined with the collapsing fire elements in the air, it formed into a new Titan's Hand.

And so, the fire elements started to reorganize, re-stabilize and instantly formed into the clenched fist shape of the Fist of Firomoz and struck hard at Nana.

This type of attack was obviously something Nana couldn't have predicted. Then, a crisp yet somehow urgent voice emerged from her mechanical throat.

"Target's behavior deviated from initial estimation," she said. "Recalculating new strategy!"

Link couldn't care less what she was doing. All he knew was that her reaction had now slowed down for a fraction of a second.

Bam!

The Fist of Firomoz struck squarely on Nana's body. The impact was so powerful that

it sent the magic puppet flying a few feet away.

While her body was still in mid-air, she was in her most vulnerable state; another idea popped up in Link's mind. The movements of the Titan's Hand followed his control precisely and changed from the fist into a stretched out hand which then clutched Nana and gripped her tightly in its palm.

Then, with a smooth and instantaneous motion, the hand then started to implode on itself.

She's heat-resistant, huh? Then let's see if she could hold up to the scorching temperature above 5000 degrees Fahrenheit in the center of the fiery hand!

"Extreme heat detected," said the magic puppet. "Heat dissipation process started."

Right after those words were heard, there was a pronounced sizzle within the Titan's Hand. Then suddenly, a hole appeared in the fiery hand, and a dark blue sword emerged from it. Then, the magic puppet whose whole body had now completely turned a burnishing red jumped out of the Titan's Hand, seemingly without any serious damage.

"Impressive!" exclaimed Link.

The Level-6 Titan's Hand could reach a temperature that would melt steel when it imploded. Yet, the magic puppet escaped from its clutches virtually unscathed. It seems that the material Vance had used called Gibb's Gold really was the toughest metal!

At that moment, Celine had already reactivated the Crimson Edelweiss and the Black Crystal Shield. Meanwhile, Vance who was standing near a huge pillar had already completed the casting of a spell.

"Metal Decay!" he shouted as he pointed his wand towards Nana. A grayish ray of light shot through the air and struck her.

Metal Decay

Level-6 Master Spell

Effects: Produces an extremely corrosive ray of light. This is the arch nemesis of all

metals.

(Note: This is one of Vance's proudest spells.)

This spell was similar to the spell Elemental Collapse that Vance had cast on the cliff earlier, only with one crucial difference – this spell exerted a spiritual control on the target which prevented them from dodging the ray of light, meaning that there was no way for a target to evade this attack!

Still, what happened next was utterly shocking.

Nana seemed to realize that she couldn't possibly evade this spell, so she made no attempt to step back or sideways. Then, there was whoosh sound, and her body mysteriously disappeared out of thin air. When she appeared again, her sword was already thrust towards Vance's head and was about to pierce through his skull!

Everything had happened too fast that Vance had no time to respond at all. In fact, he was still controlling Metal Decay and aiming at Nana when he realized that she was now right in front of him.

But while Vance couldn't respond, Link definitely could. In truth, Nana only seemed to disappear in Vance, Celine and Dorians' eyes. Link's eyes could still follow Nana's every step in that moment. Just as Nana was rushing towards Vance, Link thought up another way to go against her.

As he focused his mind, he began to do two things simultaneously. With one hand, he controlled the Titan's Hand and transformed it into the Fist of Firomoz and struck it at the Necromancer swordsman Dorians. Meanwhile, his other hand was casting the Magician's Hand.

The Magician's Hand's target was not Nana, but was instead aimed at Vance. To be precise, it was aimed at the eye sockets that held his Soul's Flame.

Crack!

Vance's skull dodged Nana's sword at the last possible instant as it was detached from the rest of his skeleton. Under Link's control, the skull, along with the Lich's wand, Gray Flame, was sent flying towards himself.

It was only then that Vance finally had time to respond, and he realized that Link had

saved his life as it was hanging by a thread.

His skull and his wand were placed in Link's hood on his back. The view was somewhat limited from here, but that was fine since he could easily use the Magician's Hand to raise his skull and leave it floating beside Link. After that, he then used the same spell to get his wand back to his side.

There was no time to thank Link for his heroic rescue, so Vance immediately cast another Metal Decay and aimed it at the magic puppet. She was purely made up of metal, which meant that it would mean certain doom for Nana. But just before Vance could cast the spell, Nana once again utilized her ultra-speed and escaped.

At the same time, there was a loud boom which came from the Titan's Hand that struck the swordsman Dorians at an incredible speed. Dorians was flung far away like a cannonball due to the impact, and his whole body slammed into the wall half a second later which then left a huge human-shaped indentation there.

He was limp and motionless when he fell to the ground. The blue light glow from his eyes became very faint. It was obvious that he'd been seriously injured.

Link then prepared to unleash another strike at Dorians to send him straight down to hell.

However, the magic puppet Nana once again launched an attack, although this time her aim was not Link or anybody else's body, but Link's Titan's Hand instead. There was another sizzle, and in no time at all, Nana successfully destroyed Link's Titan's Hand for the third time and thus saved Dorians' life.

As soon as the Titan's Hand collapsed, there was another bang coming from her position, and it turned out that once again she was rushing towards Celine in breakneck speed and had now broken through the newly reformed Crimson Edelweiss and Black Crystal Shield.

This magic puppet was simply a machine of destruction hell-bent on eliminating her every target. She was now on a direct collision course with Celine, and her speed exceeded even that of a supercar. If Link, Vance, and Celine did not join all their forces together, there would've been no chance for any of them to defeat her.

Luckily, Celine was already prepared for Nana this time. Her Blue Crystal sword was positioned precisely where Nana's attack will hit her, and shortly after, her sword and

Nana's own sword clashed, producing a loud clang.

Then, cracks appeared on the blade of Celine's crystal sword. The cracks started to spread out like a spider web, and her body was flung backwards by the terrifying forces of the impact.

Link almost jumped out of his skin when he saw what had transpired. Although Celine's sword wasn't of epic quality, it was still an extremely high-quality weapon made with a type of magic crystal that was as tough as the metal Khorium. The fact that it was cracked just showed how frightening the force of the attack was!

She must've aimed the attack at the weakest point of the sword! Link realized.

Meanwhile, Nana was not done with Celine. She rushed forward towards her and was about to give her the last blow.

Link had by then re-formed a new Titan's Hand and was about to block Celine from Nana's attacks, but to his surprise, there was another loud boom. The next thing he knew, Nana had changed her direction and target and was now rushing towards him!

"Target locked," said Nana with her eerily calm voice. "Threat level, five stars. Must eliminate as soon as opportunity arises!"

Link had successfully thwarted her attacks by then, so she had learned to treat him as the primary target whose elimination was her highest priority.

At that point, Celine's body had been struck by a violent force and was flung far backwards. She was then completely powerless and couldn't even maintain her own body's balance, let alone unleash an attack at Nana.

On the other hand, Vance was still casting his Level-6 spell Metal Decay and would need at least another second to complete it. Even if he was to forcefully stop the spellcasting process, there was still nothing he could do to cast a powerful enough defensive shield between Nana and Link.

This meant that Link was all alone now.

His only defense against Nana was the Crimson Edelweiss. Yet, Link had seen many times how this spell was simply useless against the force of Nana's speed and power.



In truth, even if Link could block himself with another Titan's Hand at this moment, Nana could still break through it so easily that it would make no difference at all.

Which meant that at this point Link's death was almost certain!

# Chapter 204

## The Invincible Magic Puppet (Part 4)

Underground Palace

The crisp voice rang across the underground palace, "Mission complete. Threat eliminated."

Nana's slender blade pierced through Link's chest as fresh blood poured out of the wound caused by the pale blue sword. Link held Nana's blade in his hand as he weakly smiled.

"Just a bit more, heh."

The next moment, Link became an elemental phantom image together with Celine, who was still airborne, and Vance's skull and headless body, who was in the middle of casting a spell. At the very last moment, Link made use of his fast reaction speed to avoid Nana's fatal attack and decisively activated his Dimensional Jump spell to escape.

This magic puppet was way too scary. It was impossible to defeat her even when the three of them joined forces. They could only escape and come back after formulating a more detailed plan.

After a light sound, the three of them disappeared from the underground palace. Nana was surprised at this turn of events. This was the first time she encountered such a peculiar situation since she was created. She stood there motionless for a few seconds before speaking with the crisp voice, "Confirm that the threat is still not eliminated. Target has been marked. Starting pursuit."

A sound of an air blast could be heard, and the next moment, she had disappeared from her location and appeared at the entrance of the hall. Another loud air blast echoed through the underground palace and Nana had begun her pursuit.

On the cliff outside the underground palace, Link, Celine, and Vance appeared out of thin air.

This was Celine's second time experiencing the Dimensional Jump spell. She managed to recollect herself quickly enough. However, Vance was still experiencing some dizziness as his skull rolled about on the ground. If not for Link's quick reaction, his skull might have already fallen off the cliff.

Picking his skull up and placing it back on his body, Vance creaked his thousand-year-old bones and finally regained his soberness.

He immediately asked, "That was a Legendary spell?"

"Sort of." Link nodded.

Vance gasped and said unbelievably, "I have heard that you are the Chosen One. It seems like they were not lying."

Link smiled bitterly and said, "Let's not mention this for now. I feel that we are still not out of danger."

As he spoke, he covered his wound with his hand and started concentrating water elements to seal his wound in ice. Although the wound did not damage any vital organs, it severed a few blood vessels and was extremely painful.

After the sealing was complete, Link cast an Elemental Healing spell on himself before drinking another high-level healing potion. That was when he was finally satisfied with his recovery process. He now merely had to find a priest when he got back to the Girvent Forest for a complete recovery.

The moment he felt safe, Celine immediately pointed to an area below the cliff and screamed, "Look, it's that magic puppet!"

"I knew it!" Link was almost speechless and stood up, "We cannot defeat her now, let's go!"

Link was not going to overestimate his abilities once again. Vance and Celine were similarly horrified by the extent of Nana's power and naturally did not have the confidence to win in another fight. They hence agreed to escape together with Link immediately. However, the magic puppet was traveling way too fast. It was impossible to outrun her on ground. Link then asked Vance, "She can't fly can she?"

Vance smiled bitterly and said, "Probably not. I did not give her that ability. But who

knows?

"Then let's fly."

Flying spells were something that Link had in his arsenal. He summoned a Storm Eagle.

Storm Eagle spell

Level-5 Ordinary Spell

Cost: 100 Mana Points for summoning, 10 points per second afterwards.

Effect: This is an extremely fast flying spell.

Link originally learned this spell so as to travel faster while he was rushing from one location to the next. Three seconds later, a pure wind elemental giant eagle appeared in front of them.

"Hop on." Link mounted the eagle. Upon seeing that Celine was about to fly with her own wings, he said, "Celine, conserve your energy."

"Alright." Celine then landed gently on the eagle's back. The last to mount the eagle was Vance.

The eagle howled and spread its wings majestically. It then jumped into the air and immediately flew in the direction of the sea.

This was not Link's choice. While the storm eagle was fast and could cover over 1000 miles in an hour, Link was still not confident that they could shake off a magic puppet whose top speed was at 2000 feet per second.

"Let's hope that the puppet doesn't go that fast in the water." Link smiled. To think that two Level-6 and one Level-7 professional would be thoroughly defeated by a human-made object—this was more than just embarrassing.

After flying for merely a few seconds, Vance reminded, "Link, faster! She is catching up to us!"

Link was still trying to get the giant eagle to speed up when he was shocked by Vance's

words. He looked behind him and saw that Nana was already on the cliff. She then leaped off the cliff decisively and charged straight towards them.

Using her top speed of 2000 feet per second, her leap was almost like a cannonball. The distance between both parties was rapidly narrowing.

However, the magic puppet was unable to fly. It was clear that she was traveling in a parabola curve. Link then commanded the storm eagle to make a sharp turn. Within a second, the beautiful, young puppet reached a distance close enough to launch an attack. However, as she could not turn in mid-air, she was just about to miss her chance.

The three of them on the eagle heaved a sigh of relief. This puppet had an overwhelming speed and presence. Even Link felt pressured when fighting against it.

However, something strange happened.

The magic puppet threw something into the air. Link observed the whole process carefully and realized that it was a large stone. As the stone flew into the air, the puppet's body made a sharp turn in mid-air! She then flew at top speed towards the eagle!

The hell? She made use of momentum and physics? This puppet is ridiculous! Link thought.

Momentum was one of the three standard laws of energy conservation on earth. Rockets made use of these theories in order to fly in a vacuum. These laws applied to the World of Firuman as well. When Nana threw a rock in the opposite direction of where she wanted to go, it was as though a rocket jet had been activated. Naturally, her body would veer towards the direction opposite of where she threw the rock.

This was an unexpected turn of events. As Nana closed in on the three of them, Link was at a loss for what to do. They were about to collide headlong.

Everyone was speechless. How could this puppet be so ruthless!

Link was the first one to react. He immediately canceled the storm eagle spell and grabbed Celine by the waist. He then raised his wand and cast a Vector Resistance Field spell onto Nana.

Vector Resistance Field was a Level-1 spell. It was a low-level spell and was not all that powerful. However, there was an occasion for every spell, no matter how useless it might seem. This Vector Resistance Field spell was near perfect for this situation.

The atmosphere blurred for a moment as the forcefield crashed into Nana from the side.

Nana was extremely fast on the ground. However, she had just used the stone in her hand and was in mid-air where there was no friction for her to capitalize on. She was thus unable to avoid this spell and suffered the full force of the collision.

The puppet then veered slightly to the side while Link made use of the opposing force of the impact to glide past Nana.

Both of them then crossed each other in mid-air as the distance between them once again widened.

Nana was out of options this time around as she fell helplessly into the sea. Link then once again summoned the storm eagle while in mid-air before commanding it to catch Vance, who was currently floating casually using a levitating spell.

With a loud splash and the crashing of waves, Nana fell into the sea. The three of them watched in fear from the eagle's back.

"Will she still be chasing us?" Celine asked, still in shock from the previous encounter.

"I have no idea. I indeed set her to endless pursuit mode the previous time though..." Vance was completely confused. Four hundred years ago, he was only a little wary of Nana's power. However, he could not bear to destroy this product that he spent so much time constructing as well. He hence commanded Nana to go into a deep sleep. Little did he know that 400 years later, not only did she awaken, she had also evolved to a point where he could not even retaliate in a direct battle.

Vance felt extremely dumb to have created a magic puppet that he could not control.

Link looked at the seabed and carefully observed the ripples on the surface of the water. He then sighed and said, "The endless pursuit mode is still ongoing. She is still running while under the water. Vance, we seemed to have been marked in a way that she can locate us no matter where we go. Do you know what kind of marking it is?"

"I do. But it is impossible to remove it." Vance awkwardly smiled.

"Why do you say so?"

"The marking is on you. When Nana pierced her sword through your body, the metal particles on her blade entered your bloodstream. These particles are extremely small. The only way to get rid of it is to drain all of your blood."

Draining blood? This was not earth where one could get a blood transfusion anytime they wanted. This meant that they only had two choices now. The first one was to run for the rest of their lives until the puppet malfunctioned. The second was to destroy the puppet.

As for escaping from her pursuit, that would be impossible.

"Why not the both of you leave while I lead her into the Norton Military Fortress?" Link said. He could not defeat this puppet alone. However, he believed that the power of the entire army would be enough to suppress her.

"It wouldn't work." Vance smiled bitterly.

"Why?" Link was confused.

"She is not just a simple-minded puppet. She is extremely intelligent and can determine danger. She will never enter the fortress alone. Unless you are prepared to spend your entire life in the army, she will definitely find a chance to face you off in a direct battle." Vance hated how well he designed this puppet. To think that he would be unable to find a flaw in this design.

Perhaps there was one in the past. However, in the 400 years when he was away, this flaw had probably already been covered up by her evolution.

"Are we really going to live our lives on the run?" Celine could not believe that this was how she would die.

Vance fell silent and looked at Link. Link knew exactly what Vance was thinking.

"You want me to use a Level-9 spell to deal with her?"

It was definitely possible to use a Level-9 spell to destroy the puppet. However, it was

wasteful and extravagant to waste a Level-9 spell on an artificial being.

"I don't think there are any other alternatives," Vance sighed.

"No, let me think about it." Link started recollecting the battle scenes in detail, hoping to find a flaw he could capitalize on.

Using his eidetic memory, Nana's actions replayed in his mind like a movie scene. After around half a minute, Link's eyes lit up.

"I've got it!"



# Chapter 205

## The Invincible Magic Puppet (Part 5)

It took ten points of Mana per second to sustain the Storm Eagle, which meant that 36,000 points of Mana would've been consumed within an hour. Link's current maximum Mana limit was 5200 points, but because of the series of attacks he unleashed earlier, he was now left with only about 2400 points of Mana.

In other words, if he were to keep on maintaining the Storm Eagle in the air, he'd be completely depleted of Mana in less than four minutes. The Mana consumption rate of a high-level flying spell was simply astronomical. This was one of the crucial reasons why flying spells weren't the most practical spells to use in battles.

Fortunately, though, Link had come up with a way to deal with the magic puppet Nana.

Link made the Storm Eagle climb higher up into the sky.

"How much time do you need to cast Metal Decay?" Link turned around to ask Vance.

"Ummm... about 1.8 seconds," answered Vance while scratching his smooth skull. He could guess what Link was planning to do. "While the spell can really cause damage to Nana, she'd never give me enough time to cast it on her."

"I suppose so," said Link, nodding his head. "That's why you must increase your spellcasting speed."

Vance was speechless for a moment.

"How do you expect me to cast a spell faster than that?" he asked Link. "That's my limit!"

"Do you remember Morestern's wand Dark Arbiter?" asked Link. "It's in the underground palace, and right now the only one who is there is the weakened Dorians—"

"Link and I will distract Nana," said Celine immediately as she caught up to Link's

plans, "and you'll go get the wand!"

"Exactly!" Link glanced at Celine with gratefulness in his eyes. It felt great to have someone on his team who could quickly understand what he intended to do.

Vance's teeth clattered for a few seconds, and he said nothing as he considered the plan.

"That sounds like a decent plan," he finally said. "But that wand needs a whole day's time to recharge after casting a Level-7 spell. Besides, you don't have much Mana left; are you sure you'll be able to hold Nana at bay?"

"I can carry him," said Celine. She could easily stay in flight for as long as ten hours or more without expending much energy anyway.

"That's unnecessary," said Link. "I've got a way to stall her. Celine, the wand is the key to our victory. You must go get it with Vance."

It would be too risky for one person to venture into the underground palace due to its labyrinthine structure. If Dorians had a functional brain between his ears, he could easily defeat Vance with sneak attacks. With Celine's help, though, there shouldn't be any problem for them to get the wand.

Although Celine was anxious of Link's safety, she saw how resolute he was and thought there wouldn't be any point in making protests, so she nodded in agreement with the plan.

At that point, the Storm Eagle had reached the highest limit of its flight at about 20,000 feet which took it 20 seconds to ascend. Looking down from here, the inky dark sea looked vast and endless. Wads of cottony clouds floated all around them. If it hadn't been for the dangerous situation that they were in, they would've appreciated the sublime view very much.

"Let's do it then," said Link. "Celine, take Vance back to the underground palace and get the wand. Take this rune tag with you, and you'll know my precise location wherever you are."

"Be careful, Link," Celine said as she took the rune tag from Link.

Link nodded. Then, Celine spread out her black wings and grabbed the almost

weightless Vance and flew away from the Storm Eagle.

Immediately afterwards, Link canceled the Storm Eagle spell and cast a levitating spell on himself.

Levitation

Level-0 Spell

Mana Consumption: 2 Points

Effects: Makes the spellcaster's body as light as a feather, light enough to walk on water. When in the air, the spellcaster will fall at the maximum speed of 1.6 feet per second for about ten minutes.

Why 1.6 feet per second? This speed was as slow as the average walking pace, and it would take about three and a half hours to fall from the height of 20,000 feet to the surface of the sea. With this leisurely speed, Link could easily summon the Storm Eagle again and use it to climb up 20,000 feet within 20 seconds before he hit the surface of the water. Using this technique, Link would have no problem floating in the sky forever!

Moreover, Link wasn't that far away from the underground palace, probably about 20 miles, so it shouldn't take too long for Celine and Vance to return with the wand. Once they returned, all they needed to do was stall Nana for a day to wait for the Dark Arbiter wand to recharge. Then they'd defeat the terrifying puppet.

As he was floating in the air, Link used the spell Eagle's Eye to check the situation on the surface of the sea. He must make sure that Nana was still following him, otherwise it would mean that Vance and Celine were in serious danger.

From what they'd seen so far, the magic puppet clearly possessed near-perfect combat skills, but her strategic planning still left something to be desired. From there Link could spot her weak points where he could utilize to defeat her.

Nana was still following Link at high speed. She's obviously locked her target on Link, as she thought that he was the most dangerous opponent with a threat level of 5 stars. Therefore, her primary goal must be to eliminate Link.

Haha, keep on following me, then, thought Link.

The Level-0 Levitation spell consumed only two points of Mana and required no additional Mana to sustain at all. With nothing to do and all this time on his hands, Link nonchalantly slipped out Bryant's Scroll of Enlightenment and began to calmly study it.

He'd studied more than half of the scroll and had made many great discoveries from it. According to Eleanor, the person who managed to study the whole scroll thoroughly would experience a doubling in the rate of Mana recovery. That would surely come in handy for Link now as his Mana was running quite low. That's why he decided to study the scroll now.

After having drifted in the air for a while, luck seemed to be on his side as a storm started to brew on the surface of the sea. With a body that was as feathery light as Link's now that he was under the Levitation spell, the slightest gust of wind from the storm kept him aloft for much longer and even helped him gain a bit of height as well.

He then used the spell, Eagle's Eye and watched the surface of the sea beneath him. He noticed how Nana struggled to catch up with him and couldn't help but laugh at her. What an adamant puppet she was!

Soon, though, Link found that the situation wasn't so funny anymore.

The wind was getting stronger and stronger as the storm brewed on. The clouds got much thicker now and had transformed from white fluffy puffs to dark, menacing clouds that harbored thunder.

A bitter smile cropped up on Link's face as he realized that he'd forgotten the most crucial fact when he meticulously planned his strategy to fight Nana. He'd failed to take into account the fact that they were in the coastal area of the Ferde Wilderness where the climate was notoriously temperamental.

Lightning soon flashed in the clouds, and the sound of thunder rumbled Link's guts. Before the sublime majesty of mother nature, Link was as insignificant as a speck of dust. The average flash of lightning was equivalent to the power of a Level-7 spell. He'd die instantly if he ever got hit by one of these lightning flashes.

Just in case, Link cast the spell Edelweiss to protect himself, then he summoned the Storm Eagle and began to ascend to its highest limit at 20,000 feet where he would be safe from being struck by lightning. Yet, the storm was just as violent there as it was

below, and Link's body was blown about like a leaf. There was no way for him to check the situation down there on the surface of the sea at all. Neither did he know where the wind of the storm would blow him to.

And so, Link drifted in the sky for about three hours when he was finally blown out from the storm, and the clouds gradually cleared out, once again allowing him to see the dark blue sea below. Then, Link immediately cast the Eagle's Eye spell and checked the situation below him. After a while, he sighed in relief at the sight of Nana still chasing after him from below.

What a relentless magic puppet, he thought. And she still hadn't lost sight of me after all this time. Not bad at all.

At that point, Link noticed a cluster of islands in front of him. There were about 30 or so islands there of different sizes. Among them, the biggest one probably had an area of about five miles. Lush forest covered most of the islands and colorful birds danced around, filling the air with bird calls and chirpy bird songs. Then, in one corner of the forest, Link saw a wild Griffin catching its prey.

Link had no intention of landing on the island. He just slowly floated above it, taking his time enjoying the beautiful view.

What a strange island, he thought.

Most of the islands were full of wildlife, yet on the southeastern corner, there was a black island where even grass and weeds wouldn't grow. It seemed as if the whole island was cursed. Link tried to sense the aura of the strange island, but he couldn't detect anything out of the ordinary coming from the place.

How odd. If no one were chasing him then, he'd dive straight down and explore the place from corner to corner. Unfortunately, Nana was still hot on his trails, so he couldn't afford to go down there.

Right at that moment, a shocking sight caught Link's eyes. He saw how Nana came up on the shores of the island where her speed increased miraculously on land. There was no sign of fatigue in her movements at all. Link was shocked. He was only hovering at 2,000 feet above the island. Nana could easily leap up from the ground and reach him at this height! Thus, Link swiftly summoned the Storm Eagle and ascended higher up into the sky.

He soon reached the height of 20,000 feet. The cluster of islands had shrunk into the size of pebbles at this height and Link could no longer see the magic puppet.

I should be safe from her here, Link thought.

He then cast the Levitation spell on himself and continued to drift in the air.

Suddenly, though, Link heard an unusual gust of wind behind him. He drew in a sharp breath when he turned around and saw a Griffin flying towards him at high speed. Sitting on its back was none other than Nana herself!

She's a smart puppet, alright, thought Link bitterly. Now that she's found herself a Griffin to fly on, things are no longer as simple as before!

The Griffin's flying speed wasn't actually that fast at only about 200 miles per hour. But the more critical point was that it had high endurance and wouldn't have any problems flying in the air for more than a dozen hours.

Link might have recovered some of his Mana when he was under the Levitation spell, but now that he had summoned the Storm Eagle, he could probably maintain it for no more than five minutes before he ran out of Mana again.

At this point, Nana would catch up to him soon enough!

I must kill the Griffin! Link thought.

He made no more attempts to flee from Nana and waited for her to approach him mid-air.

Half a minute later, Nana had driven the Griffin to about 300 feet away from Link. He could clearly see that the Griffin was reluctantly following Nana's orders only because her powers had overwhelmed it and rendered it helpless against her will. Three hundred feet was the range limit of Link's Whistle. The Griffin had no protective gear around its body, so Whistle was more than enough to cause damage to its body.

Link focused his eyesight and activated the Crimson Edelweiss in his bracelet just in case. Then, he raised his wand and directed his Mana into it, casting five Whistles in a row, taking 0.08 seconds for each of them.

Whoosh! Whoosh! Whoosh...

The Whistles tore through the air and headed straight towards the Griffin.

The magic puppet Nana quickly blocked the Whistles at an unimaginably fast speed. A series of dings rang out in the air. Nana had quite effortlessly deflected all of Link's Whistles from the Griffin.

What Link found even more shocking was how nimble and agile Nana's movements were. Not only did she cut off Link's Mana from the Whistles, making it impossible for him to control them, she'd also used her tremendous power to deflect the attacks right before the Whistles exploded.

The Whistles had now been flung out about 50 feet away before their spell structures collapsed which triggered their explosions. At that distance, even with the metal fragments in the air, they posed no threats to the Griffin whatsoever.

It was the first time Link had ever seen one of his most powerful attacks get deflected so easily!

As expected from a magic puppet that's evolved over 400 years, Link thought. Ah, her combat skills almost make her indestructible!

But naturally, Link had other attack strategies up his sleeve other than Whistles alone. He still had his Glass Orbs, which could do nearly as much damage to the Griffin as Whistles could.

Mana flowed into his wand once again, and Glass Orbs took form at an indescribably high speed. With the help of the Domingo crystal, Link managed to cast 50 Glass Orbs per second.

For a moment, there were countless lines of light between Link and the Griffin.

Nana blocked the attacks with her sword as she did before. The Glass Orbs burst like soap bubbles as they hit the blade of her sword. And in no time at all, none of Link's Glass Orbs remained.

Nana's swordsmanship was flawless indeed, but there was one tiny problem that was out of her control.

Because of the succession of explosions were so near to the Griffin, the creature was completely spooked, and it fled instinctively away from Link, overruling Nana's

command no matter how much she tried to subdue it.

The Griffin escaped further and further away from Link, and Nana fixed her eyes on him as if she had made a certain decision. She stood up and used the Griffin's body as the springboard to leap forward towards Link.

Nana had witnessed Link's reaction speed many times by now so she knew that there was a chance that she could hit him this way. But still, this was her only chance!

Meanwhile, Link entered the state of absolute calm that was the spellcasting state. He amassed all of his energy and attention and dared not relax for even the briefest fraction of a second. He knew that the slightest mistake he made would result in death when faced with such a terrifying opponent.

Nana was insanely fast; she was now only 16 feet away from Link. Seeing this, Link immediately raised his wand and cast the defensive spell, Vector Protective Force Field.

The Level-1 spell got to work instantly and flung the magic puppet away from Link. At almost the same time, Link saw a black stone getting hurled at him by Nana, evidently as a direct attack. Although it was only an ordinary stone, once in the hand of the terrifying magic puppet, it turned into a menacing weapon that shot through the air towards Link at the speed of 2600 feet per second.

In truth, the speed at which a stone traveled would always be faster than the speed that the thrower was moving at. Therefore, because Nana herself was moving at 2000 feet per second, it only made sense that the stone that she threw was moving as fast as a rifle bullet!

This didn't pose much of a problem to Link, though. He was sure that his Crimson Edelweiss was sturdy enough to deflect the stone. Once the stone hit the edges of the shield, it was met with a ring of scorching light. The heat from the light ring slowed it down at first, then the stone burned up into flames and began to disintegrate. 0.01 seconds later, Link discovered that there was something strange about the stone. Its surface looked normal, but at its core, there were tiny blue sparks of electricity.

Link had seen those sparks before. They were on that dark blue sword she'd used earlier, and they had a strong anti-magic effect.

It seemed that Crimson Edelweiss alone wouldn't be enough to stop this stone!



"..."

Things were looking bad!

By this point, Link didn't have any time to do anything to counter the incoming attack. At the very last second, he cast a Level-0 defensive spell, Mage Armor and instantly, a pale green glow enveloped him as the armor took form.

Bam!

The stone smashed into Link's stomach. It was less than two pounds. When it reached Link's body after having broken through Crimson Edelweiss, its speed was no more than 30 feet per second.

The problem was that Link's body... was not much stronger than that of the average person's.

Link was thrown completely off balance by the impact, and all he could feel was the excruciating pain in his stomach. His black eyes dulled, and he almost lost consciousness for a while, although he soon recovered.

What truly horrified Link was the strange sensations he felt in his stomach as if an alien force had penetrated into his body and interfered with his Mana.

Then there was a flash on the interface showing a warning from the gaming system.

Player has been afflicted. Current state: Mana Disorder.

Estimated total recovery time: three hours.

At that instant, all magical functions in Link's body were shut down. He could only manage to maintain the Levitation Spell and activated the defensive spell in his bracelet, in case Nana flung her sword at him when he was in his most vulnerable state.

Fortunately, Nana cherished her sword too much to throw it away at Link, so he was safe in that regard. Link sighed in relief and floated down towards the cluster of islands below. While he was in mid-air, he took a deep breath and relaxed his body to speed up its recovery time.

What a fearsome magic puppet, Link thought. Her battle intuitions are amazing! I can't waste any more time playing cat and mouse with her.

Link decided not to run away any longer. There must be more than one Griffin on these islands, so there was a high possibility that Nana would catch another one to chase him with. Once she caught up with him, there was no saying what she would do then.

It's time to end this battle once and for all. Link took out the Prophetic White Stone from his storage pendant. If nothing else happened within these two hours, then he would use it to end the battle as soon as his feet landed on the ground.

He'd planned on saving a Level-9 spell originally; it's too bad that it wouldn't be possible now.

Meanwhile, Nana was similarly falling to the ground because she'd been struck by the impact of Link's Vector Protective Force Field. Her falling speed was extremely fast, but she fell right on one of the islands.

Boom!

A crater of about eight feet wide and five feet deep was created on the spot where Nana hit the ground. Still, she stood up and dusted her body off as if completely unhurt. She then turned around and entered the forest to look for a Griffin, while not forgetting to keep an eye on Link, who was slowly drifting downwards from the sky.

# Chapter 206

## A Bizarre Island

It had been an hour; Link floated in the air using a levitation spell. He had been slowly descending and was now at an altitude of 6000 feet. He had also recollected himself in this period.

Although the Mana disturbance effect had not completely worn off, his spellcasting speed was now back to its original state. The only side effect left was the inevitable flaws that would appear in his spells due to the status he was afflicted with. It would be fine to use such spells on ordinary people. However, it would be disastrous to have such a flaw when dealing with Nana.

If he did not have the Prophet's White Stone in his hand, he would not have even had the slightest chance of escape, much less turn the tables around.

Nana was designed to calculate every detail of a battle down to the specifics. She was so perfectly created that even a combat master like Link felt pressurized and shackled.

Four hundred years of battle experience is really a force to be reckoned with. Link did not feel defeated, though. He believed that given enough battle experience, he too would have the same impeccable knowledge of combat as Nana.

The sounds of flapping wings could be heard. Link looked behind him and saw Nana on another Griffin. She was hovering at a distance 600 feet away, staring at him in waiting. Link was highly focused, though he stayed still the entire time. He displayed a relaxed and calm demeanor as he floated down slowly.

Nana also kept her distance and lowered her altitude slowly, matching Link's movement.

The previous two battles that happened mid-air ended in her failure. This meant that the odds of her defeating Link in the air were not high. She would thus wait for Link to land before making her move. The land was her home ground. She could kill her target in just a single strike.

"Target is locked in. Target is currently landing... 1900... 1800... 1700..." the crisp voice constantly rang from Nana as her clear eyes were fixated on Link. It seemed pure and innocent enough, though it would probably feel like the reaper's incarnate if one was the target.

After half an hour, Link's altitude had been reduced by another 3000 feet. The islands beneath him had become clear. He could see the flora and faunas on the island clearly. Furthermore, he was pleasantly surprised to find that his landing spot would be right on the black-colored island.

How coincidental. Link smiled. He had around 1900 Mana Points and could probably maintain the Titan's Hand for 20 seconds. This should be enough to deal with Nana.

At that moment, the subtle howling sounds of wind appeared again. Link then felt a familiar magic fluctuation. As he turned his head, he saw Celine and Vance returning from their mission. Vance held a staff with a black skull perched at its tip. It was none other than the Dark Arbiter. This was good news. If they could make it through the day, this would be the key to their success. However, the plan now had to change.

"Link, how are you?" Celine whispered as she stared at Link's pale face with a worried expression.

"Just some minor injuries," Link answered.

Nana had also noticed their arrival and immediately adjusted her position to ensure her safety. On the other side, Link made use of this chance to cast the Clear Thoughts effect on the Flame Controller's Robe. The Clear Thoughts effect would recover 2000 Mana Points. In this battle where a split second could determine life and death, more Mana Points was always useful.

After activating the special effect, a pale heat wave enveloped the robe. It was as though Link's body temperature suddenly rose to an insane level, making it slightly intimidating.

Nana had never seen such a phenomenon before. She expected Link to release a strong spell. She immediately retreated 300 feet behind her.

She is, after all, just a magic puppet. Although her battle experience is useful, there is a limit to her knowledge. Link felt that his chances were getting better.

Taking advantage of this, Celine successfully reached Link's side.

Vance then cast a levitation spell on everyone so that Link could focus his attention on Nana. They then floated down slowly.

"Link, what is the plan now?" Vance stared at Nana, who was currently riding a Griffin. The Flame of the Soul in her eyes jumped around actively. This puppet was too intelligent; they were even losing their air-borne advantage.

Link had decided, "Once we land, I will release a Level-9 spell."

Although he was relieved that Vance and Celine were back to support him, it had been proven that their combined power was still not enough to deal with Nana. Now that he was injured, it was impossible to delay the battle until the Dark Arbiter's effect reset the next day.

A Level-9 spell was the only course of action.

Celine interrupted, "Perhaps we can kill her Griffin."

Link smiled bitterly, "I've tried. She is very protective of it. No matter what I did, I was not successful. Furthermore, I am now under a Mana disturbance status. The strength of my low-level spells is reduced by at least 50%."

Upon hearing those words, Celine gave up on her idea.

Vance was speechless as well. He had heard rumors about Link when he was at his full power. It was said that the scene was akin to a storm of low-level spells mercilessly raining on his opponents. To think that Nana was able to defend against this ferocious magic storm! He probably would not be of much help even if he were to be present in that battle.

Vance was still bitter that they had to waste a level-9 spell on a puppet. He said reluctantly, "We can just let Celine bring us on the run."

Before Link could speak, Celine shook her head and answered, "My speed will be much slower than the Griffin if I had to carry two people with me. This applies to my endurance as well."

Vance then laid out his hands helplessly, "I guess we have no choice."

The three of them kept silent as they slowly descended.

Ever since Nana got a Griffin as her aid, they lost their airborne advantage. They even lost their advantage to cast the first attack as there was a limit to their spellcasting range. Nana was extremely cautious and would retreat the moment she felt something was amiss. She would not give them the opportunity to release any spells.

Hence, both parties were merely waiting to land before engaging in a fierce battle.

Time passed quickly, and before long, they were only 300 feet above the ground. Under them was a bizarre looking black-colored island.

Suddenly, Link felt that something was amiss. His hand seemed to feel heavy. More accurately, it was his fingers that were feeling the weight. It was as though something was pulling on it. Link was confused. He quickly realized that this pulling sensation came from the Baron's seal on his hand.

Link's instinct was to immediately observe his Baron's seal. However, the moment he moved, he felt a subtle tingling feeling coming from the ring. He also felt the same sensation coming from the defensive ring he wore. This would not have been possible without Link's sensitivity. It felt as though a mini electric current was running through them.

But why would there be a current in mid-air?

As they continued on their descent, Link felt the pull on his Baron's seal becoming more prominent. This ring was not made from a good material, merely from cheap iron.

Wait a minute... Iron?

This downward force was almost similar to the attraction forces from a magnet. Is this really a magnetic force?

Link then looked at the black colored island. He observed that the island was in fact a huge, black, rocky reef that was around 900 feet in diameter. There was some scattered gravel on the surface of the island which looked extremely strange. Link saw that one of them seemed to be hanging precariously from a cliff without any form of external help. This was a violation of the rules of physics.

Link was suddenly inspired. "Could this be an Ever-Magnetic Island?"

They were merely 150 feet above ground level and the attraction forces pulling on the Baron's seal were getting stronger by the minute. Link had to put the ring away into the dimensional pendant as it was becoming too much to bear. He then tried to raise the Starcatcher wand in his hand.

The Starcatcher's main body was made almost entirely of premium Gold and Thorium, both of which were metallic substances. The moment he moved the wand, he felt that the surface temperature of the wand would experience a slight increase.

When metallic substances cut through magnetic lines, electric pressure resulting in voltage will be produced. If a loop is created, then a current would be produced. As the wand is irregular in shape, there could be a vortex that forms in its inner structure, causing the temperature to rise. I merely made a slight movement with the wand and such obvious temperature difference could be felt. Just how strong is the magnetic field on this island to have such a powerful current conversion rate?

This was the theory of using magnetic forces to generate electricity on earth. Although the exact specifics might be slightly different in Firuman, the general theory was the same. In fact, this was the theoretical basis for most lightning elemental spells.

Link was then struck by an idea. He stared at Nana 600 feet away and realized that she was made entirely of metallic materials. This island would be where she would meet her demise!

Link was excited and immediately said, "Did both of you feel it? This island is special.

Celine felt nothing but a slight headache. This was a normal physical abnormality under the presence of a strong magnetic field.

Vance, on the other hand, was slightly more sensitive and gasped, "How interesting! This island is a mine for extremely strong magnetic materials!"

"Perhaps we have a chance against Nana here." Link turned to Celine and asked, "Do you have any spare swords?"

"Of course." Celine took out a one-handed sword made of gold.

"That would be fine. We will commence our battle against Nana right here," Link's eyes

glowed as he declared.

This island was extremely special, and Nana would certainly have no experience in dealing with magnetic fields. The lack of any battle experience on Nana's side would be their greatest advantage. Furthermore, even if she had the relevant battle experience, it would be futile. The fact that her whole body was composed of metallic materials would mean that her movements would be limited on the island!



# Chapter 207

## You're Impeded Here!

Buzz... Buzz... Buzz...

Once they'd landed on the ground, Celine, Link, and Vance all activated their defensive spells. They took the same positions as they did in the underground palace—Celine was in front, while Link and Vance stood side-by-side behind her.

Nana had reached the ground too. She stared at Celine who was standing in front and estimated her strength.

"Target locked," said the magic puppet with her uncanny voice. "Threat level: 2 stars."

The instant she finished speaking, there was a loud boom in the air. Nana had used her deadliest move—the Ultra-Speed Charge!

In previous battles, whenever Nana used this move, she'd appear as if she'd vanished out of thin air to the eyes of those with slow reaction time. This prevented her opponents from estimating where her attack would come from, which would naturally render them helpless and defenseless.

But this time there was a problem!

Moments after Nana seemed to disappear, a mysterious figure glowing in red light appeared suddenly. Not only that, but Nana who was supposed to charge at full speed straight towards Celine was resisted by an unknown force. It threw her off balance and flung her away from her target just when she was about 30 feet away from Celine.

Because of her extreme 2000-feet-per-second speed, she'd sliced through the outrageously strong magnetic field of the island which caused a terribly high electric current to run through her metallic body.

The force of the electric current was equivalent to being struck by a lightning spell!

What was even more frightening was how her body got magnetized by the electric

current, which then caused her body to interact with the magnetic field of the island even further. That was what threw her off balance.

"Huh...?" Celine's stunning pair of eyes widened at the sight of Nana's accident. It was something she'd never expected to occur.

Link and Vance had predicted this outcome, though. They wasted no time and each cast their own attacking spells!

"Titan's Hand!"

At the instant when Nana was flung away from them, Link's Titan's Hand quickly caught up to her and changed into the form of Fist of Firomoz and slammed down violently against the magic puppet's body.

Bang!

Nana's body was struck just as she was about to hit the ground, and the impact sent her flying again at high speed. She kept on intercepting the magnetic lines of the island which would generate more electricity in her body.

The magnetic force converted kinetic energy into electric energy, and once the electric current ran through Nana's body, it would then be converted into a huge amount of heat. In other words, this meant that the extremely high levels of kinetic energy (due to her extreme speed) would eventually be transformed into an equally high level of heat!

The higher the temperature of Nana's body, the more intensely her body would emit the red light.

"Body temperature will soon exceed limit," said the voice coming from Nana's body. "Begin heat dissipation! Begin heat dissipation!"

Soon, Nana did not dare to move at high speed even though she wasn't completely comprehending what was going on. Her most lethal weapon, her speed, was now canceled out by the Magnetic Island.

Finally, Vance now had enough time to cast his spell. 1.8 seconds later, he pointed his wand towards the magic puppet and shouted, "Metal Decay!"

A gray light shot out from the wand and went after the magic puppet. Nana immediately detected the great threat coming from this ray of light, and she instinctively dodged it with her lightning speed, causing another boom to reverberate through the air as she seemed to disappear once again.

Only this time, she was forced to reappear a mere seven feet away.

The red light on the surface of her body had now turned white, proving that the metal that made up her body had reached an extreme temperature that was close to its melting point.

Sizzle sizzle!

The Metal Decay finally caught up with her and struck her chest. Thick white smoke billowed out from the spot, and a fist-sized gaping hole appeared where the ray of light hit her body.

Nana just stood there motionless now, and the mechanically crisp voice once again emerged from her body.

"Fatal damage detected on the body," the voice said. "Begin repairing process."

"Repairing process failed," the voice continued. "Performing memory backup... Backup successful. Hibernation process initialized. Mission to protect master has failed... failed... failed... failed..."

Then, Nana's body trembled and flailed about violently for a few seconds before her head and arms got detached from the main body and dropped to the ground. The rest of her body just stood there without any signs of life or movement left in it.

"Is she defeated now? Just like that?" asked Celine, hardly able to believe it. Somehow it had seemed a little too easy.

Link nodded and heaved a long sigh of relief.

"She's gone into hibernation," he said. "We've won."

Vance, on the other hand, said nothing. He stared at the motionless magic puppet wordlessly for quite some time before letting out a long sigh.

"I built her in my daughter's image, you know," he finally said. "And now she's dead by my own hands."

As he spoke, he slowly approached Nana and made a move to examine her more closely.

"You should probably cast Metal Decay on her one more time," Link reminded Vance, "just in case she's not totally destroyed."

"That wouldn't be necessary," replied Vance. "That last attack from me was aimed at her Mana core."

The old Lich seemed to have fallen into a deep melancholic mood. He completely ignored Link's dissuasion and insisted on approaching Nana's lifeless body. He then stretched out his bony hand and softly touched her face.

Crack!

The magic puppet's body jerked suddenly, and her arm shot straight towards the Lich's skull.

Vance's skull was indeed very tough, but it was still far less sturdy than the metal that made up Nana's body. If Vance were to get struck by the full force of Nana's arm, his head would be blown to bits, and the Flame of Soul in his head would be instantly extinguished.

Nana's arm still moved too fast for Vance to respond appropriately, and he could only watch helplessly and brace for the incoming impact.

Just then, a dim red glow appeared around Vance's body—it was Link's Crimson Edelweiss!

Nana's arm was immediately slowed down by the shield's force field, and it finally stopped completely four inches away from Vance's skull. Half a second later, the arm was deflected away by the force field.

Nana's head jerked up sharply, and her clear eyes stared straight at Link. Then a hoarse voice emerged from her body.

"Mission failed," the voice said. "Residual energy exhausted... Target threat level: 5

stars... 5 stars... 5... stars..."

Then, as if all the life force had been drawn out, Nana's body collapsed completely to the ground, and all the segments came apart. This time, it seemed that she really was totally destroyed.

Only then did Vance manage to react to what was happening. He touched his smooth skull with his bony fingers and felt that his Flame of Soul was still burning. He did not expect Nana to still be able to attack him like that. It was indeed a close shave for him just now. He could easily have just died in that instant, not knowing what hit him.

Originally, Vance wouldn't have minded dying at all. But now that he'd fought through such a thrilling and fierce battle with Celine and Link, he found that he still very much wanted to live after all.

The sun still shone upon the earth, he realized. There are still worthy things to live for, like trust among comrades and loyalty in friendship.

This battle had really turned Vance's rusty and nihilistic views of life completely upside down.

"Thank you, kid," Vance said to Link with a wave of his hand.

"You're welcome, old man," replied Link.

Both then looked at each other and felt there was a newly formed trust between them. Suddenly, they both erupted into hearty laughter. Celine looked on at them curiously. She turned to Link, then to the old Lich, but couldn't work out what they both found so funny.

Then, Vance squatted near Nana's remains and began to carefully examine the magic puppet's body. He wanted to see how she had evolved and what had happened in the last 400 years.

Link, on the other hand, began to study the magnets on the ground. He picked up a piece of black stone and observed it closely. He found that it was, in fact, greenish black and had a strange spiral pattern on its surface. When he placed it closer to his nose and took a whiff, it smelled somewhat pungent and metallic. Then, an idea popped up in his mind, and he quickly turned around to Celine.

"Cut it in half with your sword," he said. "I'd like to see its cross section."

Celine then swiftly pulled out her sword, and as the blade glinted in the sunlight, she quickly cut the magnetic stone cleanly in half. The cross-section was smooth like that of a metal and was completely different from the usually rough surface of an ordinary magnetic stone. Upon seeing such a cross-section, a big grin appeared on Link's face. He realized that he was going to make a fortune!

Link had once read of a type of metal in a textbook on magic materials back when he was in the East Cove Magic Academy. The metal was called Gyromagnetic Iron, and it was described as having a pungent smell and had spiral patterns. Its magnetic field was a hundred times stronger than that of the ordinary magnets.

When this kind of metal was ground into powder and mixed into a dissolving potion, then put through a certain process, the result would be sparkling ink, which was a type of electrical ink. A small vial of this special type of ink would cost about ten gold coins. The capital to produce it was only three gold coins, containing in that small bottle no more than one ounce of Gyromagnetic iron.

Yet, this Magnetic Island surely contained thousands and thousands of tons of Gyromagnetic Iron. If he could turn them all into sparkling ink, Link realized that he'd be making a mountain-sized heap of gold coins!

But it wouldn't be so simple of course. The price of sparkling ink would drop drastically if there were a large amount of it on the market, probably as low as one gold coin or even one silver coin per vial. Even so, it would still make a huge fortune for Link.

When he thought of this, Link got so elated that he couldn't help but laugh heartily. He leaped up into the air then took Celine into his arms and danced.

"Hahaha, Celine!" he shouted, "this island will make us so much money that there'll be more than enough to build my estate now!"

Although Celine had no idea of the Gyromagnetic Iron's true value, she was still very happy to see Link so joyful.

Link let go of Celine eventually, but he still held her close. Now that he'd found the perfect excuse to be affectionate to her, he wanted to prolong the blissful moment as much as possible. At that point, Link felt his chest could just burst from the joy he felt,

and his whole body was overcome with a tingling sensation while the wound on his body no longer gave him any pain.

Celine's cheeks blushed till they were as red as apples. She let Link hold on to her without any complaints. In fact, she was holding Link's hand herself.

Crack! Rattle!

The sound from Vance's skeletal body jerked Link and Celine rudely back to reality. They then quickly separated from each other when they realized the awkward positions they were both in. This made Vance rub his smooth skull and laugh cheekily.

"Oh, don't be shy," he said. "It's nothing to be ashamed of."

Celine lowered her head and said nothing. Link tried to calm himself down quickly and wiped the grin off his face.

"Did you find anything interesting about the magic puppet?" he asked, desperate to change the subject.

Vance nodded his head. "I think I've found the reason why I lost control of her," he said.

Link suddenly became interested. "Can you solve it, then?" he asked.

"That would be slightly difficult," answered Vance. "I can't do it alone. But if you're willing to help, I think we can revive her and turn her into a frightening combat machine."

"What if you lose control of her again?" asked Celine. It was a crucial problem that they couldn't afford to ignore. This magic puppet had pushed them all to the point where their lives were hanging on a thread, after all. It made them shudder even thinking about it.

"That's where the difficulty lies," said Vance, scratching his head and looking over to Link. "What do you think?"

Link considered the matter for half a minute.

"I don't really understand the principle that underlies a magic puppet's inner workings," he said, "so I can't give you a meaningful opinion now. Let's just bring her

back with us first."

Vance nodded in agreement.

"That is a wise choice," he said. "I don't have any objections to that. Once we return, I'll hand you my notebook which contains notes and descriptions of the magic puppet so you can study it."



# Chapter 208

## The Vast Treasures of the Old Necromancer

The group of islands in the middle of the ocean was a distance away from the Ferde Wilderness. If Celine had to make two 380 miles' roundabout trip to ferry them back to camp, she would definitely be drained of her energy. Luckily, there was a group of wild Griffins on the island.

They grabbed a Griffin each after intimidating them with their powers and commanded them to fly back in the direction of the mainland.

The Griffins were fast. Within two hours, the three of them once again arrived at the entrance of the underground palace. The moment the three Griffins regained their freedom, they flew off immediately, looking clearly startled and in fear. They then proceeded all the way into the deepest area of the underground palace without any obstructions.

Vance carefully observed the furniture in the underground palace and said in disbelief,

"This is a surprise. Everything here is intact. Even the position of the chairs has not been changed. If not for my memories of the past 400 years, I would even feel that I just left this place a day ago."

Link laughed. "This is the work of your magic puppet. This place is her sanctuary, and her only goal is to protect the integrity of this sanctuary."

Speaking of Nana, Vance sighed, "She was so overprotective that she even forgot who I was."

Under the influence of all this familiar furniture and scenery, memories started flashing through Vance's mind. He ran around in this magnificent hall while mumbling things to himself.

"This scroll... Oh! It's an unfinished spell. To think that it is still kept half open, like how I left it when I left this place!"

"This chair was my favorite. Nothing has changed, not even the dust that settled... Oh, the activation trigger is still active. It still has not rusted."

He pressed the trigger, and all of a sudden, machinery sounds could be heard from the back of the wall. In a few seconds, a wall on the left side of the hall started moving backwards before going deeper underground.

Behind the wall was a space 15 feet deep. There were three antique chests placed within the space. Each of the chests was huge, measuring at three feet tall and six feet wide. From the design of the chest, it could be determined that they were painted 500 years ago when the Assyrian Dynasty was still in power.

Vance beckoned to Link and Celine, "Come over here. Look at my treasures."

He went into the hall and opened the chest on the left. Layers of wooden shelves then emerged from the chest, amounting to an astounding 20 layers. Every layer then had over 40 boxes which were stuffed with items.

"This is a Vochit-style chest. It is the most stable dimensional chest which compresses items in a 50:1 ratio. There is a total of 800 boxes in this chest which are filled with a variety of rare metals and materials. For example, this piece of Thorium is close to 1.5 kilograms."

Vance then took out a piece of Thorium. It was originally the size of a thumb. However, when it was exposed to the original atmosphere, it expanded to the size of a fist, the silver brilliance nearly blinding anyone in sight. Link once saw a similar chest in Herrera's room. However, that chest was nothing compared to the current one right in front of him. Looking at the brilliance emanating from all the rare materials, Link could finally understand why Vance said his wealth was enough to even build a Mage Tower similar in scale to the Heaven's Thorn.

Celine merely stared with her mouth slightly opened. She could not believe that a man could accumulate this much wealth.

Vance was extremely satisfied and laughed with glee, his bones clattering as his body shook. "I made a fortune in those days selling my Battle Aura books. Those nobles would purchase them from me regardless of the cost. I was once the world's wealthiest businessman."

He then walked towards the second chest and opened it. This time around, rows of

books appeared in the chest. The books were all intricately designed with jeweled hardcovers and high-quality paper. One could even feel magic fluctuations from the books, suggesting that some of these books had records of powerful magic formations.

There were at least 300 books in total. Link randomly picked out a book titled *The Insane Microscopic Universe*. After browsing through a few pages, Link saw a formula which attracted his attention. It was almost identical to the one he had been racking his brains over in his thesis. After a few more pages, Link saw even more identical content. He shared some similar ideas with the author of this book, and there were even some details inside which he hadn't thought of.

Link already felt inspired after just a few pages. "This is just priceless!"

Link had a real look of euphoria on his face. The rare materials which almost blinded him merely made him slightly excited. However, these magic books were simply a wonderland.

Vance once again laughed with pride. It was an achievement to make a genius such as Link lose his usual calm demeanor. He then opened the last chest. This chest was a lot more empty, housing a few intricately designed scrolls. Vance browsed through these scrolls one-by-one as he caressed each of them with his bony hands. He seemed to be reminiscing about some good memories.

He smiled emotionally. "The Battle Aura scrolls and all my research journals are housed here. Although it is not as voluminous as the other two chests, this took me at least 200 years to complete. I even had to carry the bad reputation as the Heartless Butcher."

Link walked over and opened a scroll. The scroll was titled *Earth Shattering Storm Style*. What an extravagant name! He then opened the other scrolls and counted a total of 16 scrolls, most of which were Epic in quality, some of them unfinished.

After introducing all his treasures, Vance then spun towards Link and said, "I have no use for such things now; you can have them all."

Although Link had expected this, when he finally heard it from Vance's mouth, he was still overwhelmed with gratitude. "Old man, I have no idea how to thank you."

Vance laughed, "The best way to thank me is to put them to good use. Use this knowledge and wealth to create the best territory there ever was!"

At this moment, Vance seemed to have remembered something. He patted his head before walking to the middle chest and taking out three magic books. He then took out a few scrolls and a journal from the right chest, passing all of them to Link. "These have all the knowledge regarding magic puppets. Take them back for your research. Also, my underground palace has already been exposed to some powerful dark figures. It is not safe to put these chests here anymore. You have to take them away as soon as possible."

Naturally, Link would.

Following which, Link and Celine became movers as they made many trips to carry the spoils out of the underground palace. It was not a small amount, and there was a limit to the amount their dimensional equipment could store. They hence had to make three trips before they emptied Vance's treasures.

After the hard work, the three of them rendezvoused at Shark Bay. At this moment, Vance held a handwritten book in his hand. This book was extremely thick and was titled Treasured War History of the Ancestors.

He smiled when he saw Link. "The last thing is the terrible climate at the Ferde Wilderness."

Link was startled when he saw the book. "Are you telling me the answer is right in this book?"

Vance smiled. "It's very likely." He opened this thick book to somewhere in the middle and pointed at a paragraph of words. "This day, the Storm Lord and the Earth Lord fought at the beach. This battle lasted three whole days. The two powerful lords were both heavily injured as they unleashed their final attack. The Storm Lord destroyed the physical body of the Earth Lord in one swing of his sword. However, he eventually succumbed to his heavy injuries and fell at the same place."

After reading it, he looked up at Link. "Do you see it? The Ferde Wilderness was the exact location of their battle. The gravel littered around the entire Wilderness is the fallen body of the Earth Lord, while the terrible hurricane that plagued this land is caused by the remnant soul of the Storm Lord."

Celine felt that it was strange. "Isn't this just a legend? Do you really believe it?"

Vance was not amused. He merely looked at Celine and said, "Young girl, legends are

actually history that has been either dramatized or modified over the years. The truth often lies behind these legends."

Link was lost in thought. As a Magician, he had once read about the history of the World of Firuman. He knew that the World of Firuman had changed over the years. Tens of thousands of years ago, there was a golden era where many Legends walked the ground. The strongest of those Legendary professionals were termed as lords.

The Storm Lord and the Earth Lord could just as well be such powerful beings. Although no one knew the exact reason for their fight, it could really explain the uncanny geography and climate of the Ferde Wilderness to a great extent.

After thinking for a moment, Link said, "I have heard that in the golden era, the lords were extremely powerful beings. Most of them would have attained an indestructible spirit which allowed them to remain on the earth in some form even after the death of their physical bodies. Does this mean that if we can find the remnant soul of the Storm Lord, we can stop the appearance of the random hurricanes?"

"You are absolutely right!" Vance snapped his fingers. He then flipped to another page on the book and pointed at a chunk of words, "The Lion Heart King came to this Wilderness when suddenly, a hurricane ensued and blew sand across the entire area. The king then lost his way and reached a mysterious canyon while trying to maneuver out of the terrible weather."

The Lion Heart King was a figure from 2000 years ago. He was a great king that loved adventure, and legends of his exploits could still be found circulating amongst the world of Firuman. Although some of the stories were made up, the passage that Vance read had revealed two important pieces of information: Firstly, the soul remnant of the Storm Lord might very well still be present. Secondly, it was probably still hidden in some canyon. Link was prepared to follow this clue and find a canyon with the presence of strong wind elements.

Celine then raised a question, "The Ferde Wilderness is huge. However, no one seems to have heard of any storm canyon."

Vance nodded. "The canyon is certainly not in the Ferde Wilderness. However, this history has pointed out that these hurricanes seem to have an origin.

Having a direction that might be false was better than having no direction at all. If one

could see through the mist covering the truth, they could very well expose the true history.

Link frowned and thought for a long while before saying, "There is a Wind Tiger in my territory that is especially sensitive to wind elementals. Perhaps I can task him to find this origin for me."

"That is a good idea." Vance closed the Treasured War History of the Ancestors and handed it over to Link. "This is the only copy. You can read the rest of the stories in your free time as well. Many of these stories have value to them."

"Alright." Link was interested in this book already.

Link and Celine then returned to the camp afterwards. Vance then found a remote place

within the Ferde Wilderness to call home. As for where that location was, he was unwilling to answer. He did, however, give Link a transmission rune to contact him whenever needed. They had also agreed to research on the theories of magic puppets together in the future.

Link naturally had no opinion on this arrangement. After returning to the Scorched Ridge, he first headed towards River Cove Town to heal his wounds. He then approached Dorias and tasked him with a mission.

"What? The origin of the hurricane?" Dorias had been living a good life and seemed to be slightly relaxed. When he heard Link's words, he subconsciously started sniffing the air in the atmosphere.

After a while, he nodded. "The wind here is indeed different. I will look into it now."

He was extremely efficient. Upon finishing his sentence, he leaped from the ground and sniffed the air while walking in a specific direction, quickly making his way out of Scorched Ridge.

It wasn't too nice for him to do nothing while he lived off Link's resources. Furthermore, he had been extremely bored these few days. He could take this chance to go out for a walk.

# Chapter 209

## Windy Cove

Dorias had gone out for three days. On the second day, there were two violent storms that seemed to come out of nowhere in Ferde Wilderness. On the afternoon of the third day, Dorias dragged himself back, and he seemed to be acting strangely.

As soon as he arrived, he rushed back to the big shed that Link had built specially for him.

"Give me some roast meat and make it quick!" he shouted. "I'm almost starved to death! Make sure you add hot peppers and sea salt to my meat!"

At that point, Link was studying the design blueprint of the magic puppet in his room. When he heard of the commotion outside, he stepped out of the wooden cabin and saw some of his servants pouring a bucket of clean water onto Dorias' body. The water that flowed from his body was full of mud and dirt.

"Where have you been?" asked Link as he approached the tiger. "Did you fall into a mud swamp?"

Dorias shook his giant head and wore a strangely proud expression on his face.

"I've found the source of the storms," he revealed. "It was on a bizarre island out in the sea, probably about a hundred miles away from here. It had been quiet and calm before I reached the island, but the moment I set foot on it, a violent storm formed very quickly. I was almost blown into the sky by the storm!"

"An island a hundred miles away from here?" asked Link. "Did you notice any cliffs or caves there?"

Dorias stared at Link in shock.

"Oh, so you know about the caves on the island?" he asked.

Link was in fact reminded of the records in the book War History of the Ancestors

where King Lionheart said that he was blown adrift to a cave. It seemed that this description was true and that he was, in fact, blown from the mainland to the island in the middle of the sea.

Once he'd found the target, Link felt that half of the problem was solved. He decided that what he must do now was to go and see the place for himself.

"I'll take you there when I'm full," said Dorias. He could guess exactly what was on Link's mind.

The head cook of the camp was very good at his job. He'd roasted two cows perfectly to Dorias' taste, so naturally, he wanted to savor every bite of food he was served. Once he'd picked all the bones clean, he burped loudly and shook his fur dry.

"Let's go," he said, turning to Link.

Link relayed the appropriate orders to his clerk, Joshua before climbing onto the giant tiger's back. They sped all the way towards the sea.

Once on the beach, Link saw that the harbor was under construction. The Yabba people were truly as efficient as they were rumored to be. It hadn't been more than half a month since they arrived, but Link could already see the rough structure of a port. If they kept on working at this pace, the harbor would be ready to use in less than a month.

The construction of the estate is on the right track now, thought Link. And I've got all the magic materials and gold coins in place. Now, it is only the matter of solving the climate problem!

Meanwhile, Dorias had already reached the edge of the shore. He then roared, and his body was immediately shrouded in glimmering blue light. Then, the tiger jumped down the cliff, and when his feet touched the surface of the water, it was as if he'd landed on firm ground. He proceeded to run as fast as the wind on the surface of the sea.

Dorias proudly shook his head to and fro against the wind as he ran.

"What do you think of my moves, Link?" he asked.

"Very smooth," answered Link with a smile.



Roar!!! Roooooaaarrrr!!!

Dorias then got more adjusted to the new surface he was running on and his speed gradually increased. It only took him under an hour to travel the 100 miles' distance. Soon enough, Link spotted a black dot over the horizon.

"Do you see that? That's the place," said Dorias. "It looks like a desert island and seems normal from afar. There was nothing out of the ordinary around it either. But as soon as you get 300 feet to the island, there's a huge gust of wind so strong that you almost can't stand it. I tried it twice when I got here, and it resulted in the same outcome both times. It really is very strange."

Link had no idea what was going on himself. He only waited to approach the island himself and experience it first-hand.

Soon afterwards, they were both on the island. It was a bleak and barren place where not even grass could grow. There was a sandy beach near the shore while the inner part of the island was made up of rusty, brown stones that were so heavily weathered they looked like honeycombs.

From afar, these stones seemed to form into caves where gentle breeze blew from their depths.

"Everything still seems normal here," said Dorias, "but once we walk further into the island things will change drastically."

Dorias crouched down a little as he walked on slowly and cautiously as if bracing for the sudden appearance of a violent storm. Link jumped down from the tiger's back and cast the Crimson Edelweiss spell on himself as protection. He then walked slowly forward while remaining close to Dorias' side.

After walking for about 30 feet, Dorias suddenly wiggled his nose as if he smelled something in the air.

"Did you sense that?" he asked. "The wind has changed."

It was an obvious change. At first, it had only been a mild breeze that they could hardly feel, but now the wind started to blow more quickly. It was strong enough to blow up the grains of sand on the beach. Without the Edelweiss spell, those grains of sand would've gotten into Link's eyes by now.

"Looks like the island has woken up," whispered Link.

"Exactly!" replied Dorias. "It's as if there's a ferocious beast in the cave and our presence disturbed its slumber."

Dorias then crouched down even lower to the ground and moved even slower. He squinted his eyes to prevent the sand from getting into his eyes. At that moment, he looked just like a cat who was ready to pounce.

Link and Dorias then walked for a further 150 feet. The gusts of wind had now turned into a storm that whistled and howled and picked up stones and sand into the air. Through the Edelweiss shield, Link could feel waves of air pressure coming from the wind. He was sure to be blown off into the distance by now if he hadn't cast a defensive spell earlier.

Dorias also began to release the blue aura around him. He crouched down almost to the ground now and would shake his head from time to time to remove the sand and stone that got caught between his fur.

"Link, it's getting a bit unbearable for me," said Dorias. "Are we still going to move forward?" Dorias had to stretch out his claws and dig deep into the ground to prevent from getting blown away by the storm. Even so, his body was visibly moving backwards, and he'd left a long deep channel on the ground where his claws were dragged backwards by the wind.

Link fared better as the Edelweiss shield helped protect him from most of the wind's power. But even he felt quite overwhelmed by the storm's sheer force. He turned around and could see nothing else in the surroundings except sand and stones.

After focusing his eyes for a while, Link could see that thick clouds were already taking form in the sky. Soon, dark clouds gathered, and a huge storm was looming over them.

It wasn't just gusts of wind around the caves now. Instead, the whole region seemed to be caught in a strong hurricane!

Link felt a wave of panic surging over him.

Is this how the storms in Ferde Wilderness are formed? Link thought. Is this place really hiding the souls of the ancient lords? But thousands of years have passed since then; how could their powers still be this ferocious?

Whoosh! Whooooosh!

The storm got louder and stronger. It now sounded like the roar of an immensely strong giant. The clouds gathered in the sky and almost completely blocked the sunlight from penetrating to the ground.

"You should stay back now, Dorias," said Link. "I'll go on for a little bit further." Link thought he'd be able to handle the storm for just a little while longer. He'd come to solve the climate problem in the Ferde Wilderness, so he couldn't back out before reaching his limits.

"Be careful, Link," yelled Dorias. He then turned around and ran towards the sea. He then jumped into the water and hid there, only keeping his head above the water to keep watch on Link from afar.

He didn't know what would happen next, but his big eyes were full of worry and apprehension.

Meanwhile, on the coven island, Link continued to move forward. The force field of Edelweiss was pulled back by the wind, making it look like a comet's tail behind Link. The force field in front of Link had been compressed and weathered by the storm until all that was left was a thin layer.

If he pressed on this way, Link knew that Edelweiss could only protect him for another 30 feet or so.

Link activated the Glyph of Soul and cast the Vulcan's Hand. Then, he quickly canceled the spell and used the Mana structure resonance to transform it into the Titan's hand.

Whoosh!

A giant hand appeared in front of Link's body, protecting him from the force of the storm.

A Level-6 spell would naturally be more stable than the Level-5 Crimson Edelweiss. Link found that he could now step forwards more easily now that he was protected by the Titan's Hand.

Link wasn't sure how long it took, but suddenly he felt that the pressure exerted on the Titan's Hand suddenly seemed to ease up. It wasn't because the strength of the

wind decreased though, but rather because the storm's power had reached the point where it could slash like knives. Without the Titan's Hand, the storm would've behaved like a thousand blades of knives that surrounded Link, and he would be slashed all over his body.

Also, Link noticed that all the sand and stones that were blown up into the air had cleared off, leaving only the pure power of the wind elements.

Maybe everything that could get picked up by the wind has been blown away, Link thought, leaving only smooth boulders here.

Link didn't dare to peek his head around the Titan's Hand to see what was happening in front of him. All he could do was walk on forward.

After another thirty steps or so, Link felt that the screaming wind around him had reached a totally unbearable point. It sounded as if he was standing right next to a jet engine!

Even the Titan's Hand was about to reach its limits. Although Link used all his powers to focus on strengthening the force field in front of him and change the form of the Titan's Hand into the more stable fist shape, he could still see that a trail of red-hot fire elements was blown behind him.

The spell would collapse any moment now.

Link realized that it would simply be suicidal for him to keep moving forward. He stopped and tried to estimate the situation around him. He could see much better here than before, but still, his view was distorted as the rapid air flow became transparent ripples.

Finally, Link noticed a faint frosty white aura on the ground where he stood and the stone walls around him.

There must be a light source ahead, not too far away from here, thought Link. But what could it be? Link was very curious but did not dare to risk his life finding out. If he took any more steps further, the Titan's Hand would surely collapse. Then, what would surely follow would be him getting minced to small bits by the violent wind around him.

Should I go back now? Link thought.

Despite the clear danger, Link was still a little hesitant and unwilling to go back. He'd come so far and so near to finding out the truth. Going back now would mean that he still couldn't solve the climate problem in his estate and that he'd have to come back here again.

He considered it for three seconds, then took out the White Prophetic Stone.

The violent climate of Ferde Wilderness was now his last hurdle in building his estate. If he couldn't solve this problem, then there would be no way for him to develop his power and build up his army. Elin, the Lady Fortuna, had warned him that the sun was about to sink under the horizon, so he mustn't waste any more precious time.

Therefore, he felt that using the Prophetic White Stone now would gain him huge and invaluable progress, so he proceeded without any more hesitation.

His Mana began to flow into the stone which caused it to emit a transparent water-like aura. This aura then flowed into the Titan's Hand in front of him, strengthening it within a second and turning it from a tattered force field into solid protection while its size was tripled as well. However, Link's Mana consumption rate increased five times now, and he was expending as high as 200 points of Mana per second.

"Clear Thoughts!" chanted Link as he activated the special powers of his robe. He then took a bottle of high-level Mana potion from his storage pendant and drank it all up in one gulp.

While a mid-level Mana potion could restore 500 points of Mana, high-level Mana potion could restore 1000 points of Mana instantly. Coupled with the effects of Clear Thoughts which boosted his Mana recovery rate, Link estimated that he would be able to hold out for another half minute.

If I can't reach the end of this cave after 20 seconds, Link thought, then I'll be on my way out!

With that decision made up in his mind, Link walked on behind the protection of the Level-6 Titan's Hand.

One second, two seconds, three seconds, four seconds...

The frosty white light got brighter and brighter, the wind became stronger and stronger, and the floor got so smooth that it was starting to be slippery. Link had to

struggle just to take a step forward now.

Ten seconds!

Link's Mana consumption rate had reached 300 points per second now, while there were only about 2600 points of Mana left in his body. In two more seconds, he would have to use the spell, Dimensional Jump to get out of here.

Just as he took the last step forward, he noticed a sudden change!

It was as if he'd broken through the layer of a barrier. He could no longer hear the wind's howl nor feel the pressure exerted on the Titan's Hand. He'd entered a calm and silent place.

There were wind elements here, and they were very densely packed too. But instead of being violent and vicious, these wind elements were gentle and calm. There was a frosty white light here as well, and it was so bright that Link couldn't look at its source directly.

Link carefully canceled the Titan's Hand and slowly turned his eyes in the direction of the light source.

A second later, his eyes widened, and he stood there in a daze.

"Isn't this...?"

# Chapter 210

## Arbiter of Storms, Master of Lightning, Silencer of Realms

This was the end of the canyon. The walls of this area were pure white in color and glistened when light was reflected off its surface. The area was also saturated with wind elements. They were so concentrated that they became visible to the naked eye, floating around Link like a thin veil.

In the center of the area, lay the origin of this spectacular phenomenon. Through the blinding brilliance, Link could see a magnificent and elegant rustic sword.

It was a one-handed sword!

It was suspended gracefully in the air and was around 3 feet long. It seemed to be formed from shimmering white crystals. There was an oval-shaped translucent dent in the center of the sword. Within this translucent area, glowing circular air currents stirred slowly while emanating a powerful presence. Around the sword, the wind elements were as docile as a sheep.

Link merely stared at the sword for a second before he felt a huge pressure coming from it. This pressure was so intimidating that he was almost forced to kneel on the ground to give respect to this almighty sword.

"What a strong presence!" Link was surprised and withstood the pressure with all his might. He did not avert his gaze, nor did he succumb to the intimidation.

Three seconds later, the information of the sword appeared in his field of vision.

Arbiter of Storms, Master of Lightning, Silencer of Realms! (Sword of the Storm Lord)

Quality: Legend

Status: Depleted (8/100) (Down to 20% power)

Effect: Owner of this sword will wield the power of storm and lightning. Any wind and lightning elemental spells or Battle Aura cast by the owner will see a 1000% increase in power and gain 30000 feet in attacking range. The offensive power of area of effect attacks will be 30% of the owner's attacking power.

(Note: Only a true master can fully control its power.)

Link was practically dumbfounded when he saw the sword. He knew this sword by name while he was playing the game.

In the game, this sword was not casually neglected on an island. Instead, it was segmented into three parts—namely the hilt, the damaged blade and the wind elemental core. One could only assemble these pieces as loot drops from the three final world bosses. Furthermore, the drop rate for these items was abysmal. Even after painstakingly collecting the parts, one would still have to spend a great deal of effort to clear a story called Prestige of the Dwarf Master repeatedly. Only when they had reached a certain level of mastery for the storyline would they be able to craft a sword completely depleted of energy.

Finally, the sword then had to be charged with mana points which would once again require a lot of time. The final in-game stats of the sword were also modified for balancing purposes, though there were similarities between the both of them.

In the game, the effects of the sword were to increase the strength of all wind and lightning elemental attacks by 300%, as well as increase the attacking range by 150 feet. Despite the great reduction in stats, it was already considered to be one of the strongest weapons of all time.

Amongst the billions of players who played the game, only around 20 of them managed to get ahold of the sword. If a wielder of the sword were to appear in town, they would immediately become the center of attention.

The power of this sword simply knew no bounds. No matter what profession you were, as long as your main element was wind or lightning, this sword would immediately make you one of the strongest players on the server. As long as one had basic playing skills, it would not be a problem to fight against three other players of the same level and supposedly same strength.

If the owner of this sword were to meet a bunch of rookies, he could even destroy a



group of twenty easily.

The sword was already near perfect in the game. However, the beauty and incomparable brilliance it had in real life were simply astonishing. The sword had revealed the true terror and gloriousness of a top-tier Legendary weapon in reality!

When the sword was fully charged, it would grant the wielder a 1000% increase in strength and 30000 feet in attacking range. The wielder could then easily destroy an entire troop of soldiers with this weapon. They merely had to swing the sword to call upon the surging thunder and howling winds. In a matter of seconds, a battalion of opponents would lay motionless on the ground.

That would be insanely cool.

Link felt a desire to walk up and claim the sword as his own. He suppressed the intense pressure emanating from the sword and stretched out his hand towards the hilt of the sword.

He succeeded! His hand wrapped around the hilt as a feeling of satisfaction overwhelmed him. However, a reprimanding voice suddenly rang, "Mortal, you are facing the weapon that once belonged to the Storm Lord. What qualifications do you have to wield me!"

"This is... a sword spirit!" Link was startled. What other surprises would this sword bring?

"I have broken through your wind elemental barrier and successfully grabbed the hilt of the sword. From that perspective, I am more than qualified," Link replied.

"Mortal, you have a strong soul. However, you are still too weak. That is really disappointing. If you were to wield me having such measly power, it would be a disgrace to my predecessor!" The voice rang again, not willing to admit that Link was qualified enough to wield him as of yet.

Link fell silent and tried to pull the sword out from its position. However, no matter how much strength he used, the sword merely levitated in the same spot and would not budge. He then started charging mana into the sword but to no avail. The moment any mana touched the sword, it would be greedily consumed by the sword which had a vast mana storage capacity, rendering it ineffective.

What a pity that he could not claim a powerful weapon that was right in front of him!

However, since a sword spirit was present, it meant that Link could strike a deal with him. After thinking for a moment, he said, "Alright then, I will not attempt to wield you. The aim of my trip is to find the origin of the hurricanes, the menace that is destroying my territory. That origin is none other than you!"

"Origin of hurricanes? Menace?" The voice sounded doubtful.

Link did not speak and let images of the Ferde Wilderness flash through his mind. He believed that the sword spirit would be able to see these images as well.

"Do you see now? Because of you, my territory has become a barren land. As the lord, I have to improve the situation!"

The sword spirit fell silent for a while before speaking again, "This was not my intention."

"Then what is it?"

"My original intention was to release my power to search for the next Storm Lord. It is such a shame that mortals are getting weaker by the day. After waiting for ten thousand years, no one even managed to reach this place. You are the first one to have succeeded. But look at your measly power! What a disappointment!" the sword was clearly dejected.

The sword spirit seemed to be highly intelligent. This meant that it might be possible to reason with him.

Link then suggested, "You want to look for a new Storm Lord while I need to protect my territory. What do you say we make a deal? You will seal your powers while I will bring you around the mortal world. One day, when you find a suitable candidate, I will hand you over to that lucky person."

The sword spirit did not reply immediately, and Link waited nervously.

After around half a minute, the majestic voice once again sounded, "Your idea is not half bad."

Link then heard a light, clanging, metallic sound as the elegant blade suddenly lost all

the brilliance it was emitting. The pure white crystals that used to glimmer were now pale white rocks, and the mysterious air ripples in the middle of the sword had disappeared. The veil-like layer of wind elements had also dissipated entirely. Link then picked up this sword from the ground.

This sword looked extremely ordinary now. It was simply a hand-crafted sword that looked slightly more aesthetic. If Link were to auction it in Hot Springs City, it would probably fetch at most ten gold coins.

"From now on, I will enter into a state of slumber. No matter what situation you are in, I will not offer my power to help. If you die in an accident, I will find another carrier myself. However, if you die of old age and happen to have any descendants, you may hand me over to them."

"It's a deal!" Link nodded as he tried to put the sword away into the dimensional pendant. However, he was not successful.

The voice then sounded again, "Don't humiliate me by putting me in such low-level magical equipment! Just carry me along on your waist like a normal sword."

Left with no choice, Link secured the sword onto his waist. Luckily, the sword was light and only weighed around two kilograms.

He then stared at the sky once again and felt the cooling sea breeze. The dark clouds and thundering bellows had all disappeared, revealing the clear blue skies that were supposed to have graced the island.

It seemed like the era of bad climate in the Ferde Wilderness was over.

Link heaved a sigh of relief as he walked out of the canyon. Halfway through, he saw Dorias walking towards him.

Dorias was unable to grasp the situation. Just a moment ago, he witnessed a storm that seemed to even tear a gap through the dimension. However, the next moment, the entire world seemed to be enveloped in warm fluffy clouds and comforting sunshine. The peculiar wind that once plagued this island had also disappeared without a trace. This was strange.

"Link, what happened?" Dorias asked.

"Do not reveal anything about me." Before Link could speak, the sword spirit gave a stern reminder.

Link needed to make up an excuse on the spot. "There is an extremely powerful Storm Lord in the depths of the canyon. I have already defeated him, and all is well."

Dorias was immediately overwhelmed with respect, "Is that true? You are really something! Is this sword the weapon of the Storm Lord in question?"

This was truly what Dorias felt. He had attempted many times to enter the canyon but only managed to reach the halfway point before he was forced to turn back. If the opponent was able to create such strong winds consistently, just how strong would he be in combat?

To think that Link was not only able to reach the end of the canyon but also defeat the Storm Lord. This was the strength of the man Dorias had chosen to follow!

Link was tickled by Dorias' reaction and nodded. "That's right. This is his weapon. What do you think? Beautiful isn't it?"

Dorias then shook his head. "It is a piece of crap. I have seen at least 10000 similar low-quality swords in my lifetime."

He then automatically squatted down to let Link mount onto him easily.

As Link mounted Dorias, the voice of the sword spirit once again appeared, "I don't like this hideous creature. Don't let me see him next time."

What is going on? Link was speechless. Didn't he mention he was going into a state of slumber? Why is he still so talkative?

"He has no manners!"

Link had nothing to say to the sword spirit's arrogance and pride.

Link then relaxed as Dorias brought him all the way back to the Ferde Wilderness. Along the way, Link admired the beautiful scenery while he appreciated the brilliant weather. With the issue of bad climate off the list, Link once again felt the passion and drive to develop his territory.

Half a day later, Link and Dorias reached the campsite. The moment they reached the outskirts of Scorched Ridge, they could hear many voices and saw a huge figure lying in wait for them. The moment Link saw the figure, he was elated. East Cove Higher Magic Academy was indeed efficient. They had already brought him the magic puppet that he had ordered.

It seemed like everything was going according to plan. Link smiled and said, "Let's speed up. I have to see how the magic puppet performs."

## Chapter 211

### A Thing or Two About the Estate's Development

Once he returned to his own estate, Link was welcomed by two familiar figures from the East Cove Magic Academy. The first one was his good friend Eliard who he hadn't seen for a long while now. The second was Rylai, the lovely girl who was his disciple.

Eliard was about to approach Link the moment he saw him but stopped in his tracks as he was shocked by the sight of the giant tiger. Dorias scowled when he noticed this.

"What a coward," he scoffed.

Once Link had hopped off his back, Dorias then raised up his head high and proud as he strode haughtily towards his own shed.

Well, there were so many strangers today so he must act his best to impress them!

Meanwhile, Link approached Eliard with a big smile on his face.

"How did you find time to come visit me this time?" asked Link, patting Eliard's back.

Eliard had been greatly motivated to dive his nose back into studying magic when he heard that Link had defeated the demon Tarviss with a Level-9 spell. Once he got back to the academy, Eliard began to study with the same obsessive single-mindedness that Link had once shown in the past.

Eliard chuckled in reply and pointed at the giant magic puppet next to him and pulled Rylai over.

"I heard you spent 15,000 gold coins ordering this big guy from the academy," Eliard said, "so I came here to see whether you got your money's worth or not. Besides, Rylai wanted to see her tutor, so I brought her with me too."

Rylai stepped forward and respectfully bowed to Link.

Link realized that he'd basically let his disciple study on her own and entrusted her to

Herrera all this while. He suddenly felt guilty for neglecting her.

"Why don't you stay here for a few months?" suggested Link to Rylai as he patted her head gently. "I'm in the process of building my estate now, so there'd be much for you to see and learn."

"Yes, tutor," replied Rylai. She had been concerned that her visit would be an intrusion upon her tutor's time, but now that she'd heard from his lips that her arrival was welcomed, all the anxieties she felt disappeared from her mind and a sweet smile cropped up on her face.

"You may go explore the place now," said Link, patting the girl's shoulder. Rylai then began to wander around the Scorched Ridge camp.

There are so many interesting things to see here! Rylai thought with excitement. Like that giant talking cat, for example. What a funny creature!

Eliard looked around Scorched Ridge and turned back to Link.

"You've really become a land-owning lord now," he said earnestly. "And you're only the same age as I am, yet you seem so much more matured and have so much more charisma than I do."

"These are just superficial things, though," replied Link with a smile. "They don't mean everything. Come on, let's go see the Plowing Magic Puppet."

They both then walked up to the magic puppet, and Link circled around it, carefully observing every detail.

The magic puppet was about 15 feet tall and had a humanoid upper body while two huge iron plows made up its lower body. Its whole body was made of anti-magic clay, and it looked as if it were made of ceramic. The whole surface of its skin was covered in magic runes, while a big magic crystal lay in the middle of its chest—this was its Mana core.

Link made sure to examine every detail of the magic puppet. He nodded occasionally and sometimes furrowed his brows slightly as he inspected the magic puppet. It basically met his requirements, but the artistry that went into it wasn't as delicate as he'd hoped. Because of his perfectionist nature, Link was slightly disappointed by this, but then he knew that this kind of working magic puppet need not be perfect in its

structure. He decided not to voice this minor complaint he had.

Meanwhile, the Magician's Apprentice who was responsible for the delivery of the magic puppet stood by nervously.

"This Plowing Magic Puppet can plow five feet deep into the soil," he started to explain. "As long as it is continuously supplied with Mana, it will be able to work 24 hours a day non-stop for at least a year."

"How efficient is it?" Link asked.

"In the case of Ferde Wilderness," he replied, "if it is working a flattened plain, then it can plow 100 acres of land in 24 hours. If it's working in a sloped area, then it will manage more than 80 acres a day."

A hundred acres in 24 hours—that meant 3000 acres a month, and 36,000 acres per year. It sounded good, but it would still be too slow due to the vastness of Ferde Wilderness.

Link decided to keep the magic puppet and see how it worked out. If he were satisfied with its work, then he'd order a few more of these.

"It satisfies my requirements," he finally said to the apprentice. "Please send my thanks to Master Weissmuller. He's solved a big problem for me."

Judging by his Mana and his attire, it seemed that the man was a mid-level apprentice and an insignificant figure in the academy. Once he'd heard Link's response, the apprentice then gave Link a reverent Magician's bow.

"We are pleased and honored to help you, Master Magician Link," he said. "Since you are satisfied with the magic puppet, then I must excuse myself and return to the academy."

"Wait," Link hurriedly replied. "I am planning to build a large Mage Tower on my estate. I've prepared all the gold coins needed too. Please bring this news back to East Cove Academy."

Although the old Lich Vance had advised him to get the help from the High Elves to build his Mage Tower, Link must disagree with him in this regard. That's because Vance had approached the problem purely from a scholar's perspective, while Link



was not merely a Magician now but a liege lord as well.

Because he had been trained in the East Cove Magic Academy and achieved his fame and reputation there and was even considered as a candidate for the future dean, he couldn't just ask for someone else's help when he was building his own Mage Tower. If he did that, it would be as if he'd cut his ties with the academy.

Not only that, the relationship between him and the academy would then run a risk of turning sour because of that.

Link couldn't afford to lose such a powerful ally as the East Cove Magic Academy.

Yet, to be frank, the High Elves did indeed possess a great understanding of magic, and their skills were truly invaluable in building Mage Towers. So what should Link do?

Link thought that the best way for him to go about this was to let the East Cove Magic Academy to help him build the main structure of the large Mage Tower but still leave a lot of room for future expansion and upgrades. Then one day, he'll find the opportunity to get the help of the High Elves to modify his Mage Tower.

That's what a wise lord would do.

Meanwhile, as soon as they heard the news that Link was going build a Mage Tower, and a large one at that, the apprentice's eyes shone with envy and admiration while even Eliard showed deep respect for his friend's achievement.

Building their own large-scale Mage Tower was any Magician's loftiest dreams!

"Don't worry, Master Magician Link," said the apprentice, "I will bring this news back to the academy immediately."

"Good," replied Link. "Here's your reward." Link then handed over a coin pouch to the apprentice.

The apprentice knew the moment he took the pouch that there were at least 20 gold coins in it. That was more than what he got for working hard in the Mage Tower for a month! He thanked Link with the gladdest heart and rushed back to the East Cove Academy immediately.

"Tell Magician Carrido that I'd like to see him," Link ordered a guard nearby.

"Yes, my lord," said the guard. He then swiftly turned around and rushed to get the Magician.

Soon, Carrido arrived.

"This is the Plowing Magic Puppet," Link told Carrido while pointing towards the magic puppet. "It can plow as deep as five feet into the ground, and its operation is very simple. Take it to the flat plain in the southern part of Scorched Ridge and test how efficient it is."

"Yes, my lord," answered Carrido. He circled around the magic puppet once to understand the general operation of the magic puppet. Then, he activated it and brought it away.

Only then was Link free enough to talk to Eliard, who was waiting for him at the side.

"I'm sorry for making you wait," he said. "Let's go inside."

"Not a problem at all, Link," replied Eliard. "You've always been busy even when you're in the academy. I'm used to it."

The two then chatted freely as they walk into the wooden cabin. Suddenly, Eliard noticed a dark-haired woman with a fascinating air about her walking out of the cabin.

"Who's that woman?" he asked, slightly surprised.

Celine stayed here on the pretense of being Link's apprentice. Still, her unique aura and temperament naturally set her apart from other people, so she was apt to be noticed as soon as she appeared.

Noticing that Celine was wearing her camouflage pendant, Link didn't need to worry that Eliard might notice anything odd about Celine.

"Her name is Celine Flandre," said Link with a smile. "She's a... good friend of mine, and she's staying here to learn magic with me."

"A good... friend of yours?" said Eliard confusedly. He then noticed the twinkle in Link's eyes and was even more surprised. He'd always thought that his friend had no interest in women. It turned out that he'd just never met the right person after all!

"Ah, I get it now, Link" he answered with a good-humored laugh. He said nothing more about the matter and continued to talk to Link about magic as they usually did.

Once they'd gotten inside the cabin, Eliard took out his own magic notebook and consulted with Link about the questions and problems that he encountered recently. Link gave his answers and guidance clearly as he always did, and Eliard reaped many benefits from their discussion.

Time flew by quickly, and the two Magicians slowly changed the subject of their discussion from magic to the war in the North of Norton Kingdom. Link didn't know as much as Eliard on this subject, so he was basically just listening while Eliard was the one talking most of the time.

"Ah, it seems that the war has gotten into a deadlock," said Eliard.

"What do you mean?" asked Link intently. He'd been busy all this while with his own affairs that he was relatively clueless about what was happening in the North.

Eliard gulped and let out a long sigh before answering. He looked more than a little worried about the war.

"Two big battles happened recently, and they were both violent and terrible," Eliard began. "It is said that 20,000 Warriors had died in those battles. Even some of the Battle Mages had suffered great injuries—many had even lost their limbs. Some of them returned to the academy, and I went to visit them. Many of them lost their legs and arms, and one of them got his chin cut off! They said it was because the Dark Elf Assassins were trying to slash the Magician's throat, but he was fortunate enough to lower his head in time and escaped with his life... How brutal!"

Eliard shook his head again and again, his face full of sympathy and regret.

Because of his outstanding magical talents, Eliard was relieved of his military service and was able to concentrate on learning magic in the academy. Although he was grateful for this, he couldn't help but feel guilty that he was hiding in safety while the kingdom was at war. To combat that feeling, he dove into his studies even more obsessively so as to relieve that guilt.

"With 20,000 Warriors dead and even more wounded," said Link with a deep frown, "doesn't that mean that the kingdom is losing the war?"

"Not exactly," replied Eliard. "It's more of a mutual defeat. The Dark Elves have suffered serious losses as well, but their resistance had gotten much more intense than before now. Every battle was fought fiercely and harshly that countless lives were lost and even more blood was shed with every mile that we advance to the North."

After that, the two friends fell into deep silence for a while.

"Maybe the king has gone too far," said Link finally. "The best thing to do now would be to stabilize and strengthen the line of defense. We shouldn't advance north anymore."

"While that is true," said Eliard with a bitter smile, "now that blood has been shed, everyone has one thing in mind, and that is to kill. The ball has started rolling, and it's very hard to stop it. I heard that the army is obsessed with the thought of chasing the Dark Elves back into the dark underground where they came from. Any suggestions of stopping would be instantly silenced."

After speaking, Eliard seemed to sink into deeper misery.

"You haven't seen how things are in Springs City recently, Link," he said. "When I was there, I saw how the townspeople had been spurred by the victories in previous battles that they were stunned by recent setbacks. Now all they wanted was revenge. To be honest with you, Link, I'm really scared..."

The people had been blinded by rage and wanted nothing but to shed more blood now. That's the scariest thing that could happen when a kingdom went to war.

Once the people wanted nothing but to bleed the enemy, things could get to the point where they'd fight until their enemies died or until they died themselves. When a kingdom got to this point, the people would get so fanatic that they'd forget the wisdom of taking a step back to save themselves. It would make it much easier for the enemy to break in through the cracks then, and there would be a high possibility that the whole kingdom would collapse. (Note: refer to the history of World War II Germany.)

There's nothing much that Link could do in this regard. The royal army was composed of aristocrats, and the more military power a certain noble house provided, the more power they had. Link had little to no power right now. Moreover, he hadn't contributed much to the war in the North, so he basically had no right to speak about the matter.

The only thing he could do now was to develop his own strength and that of his troop.

"Let's not talk about this anymore," said Link. "Why don't you stay here for a few days? We still have much to talk about."

Link was the pride of East Cove Magic Academy now, so naturally, the academy would put his matter as their priority. Which was why only four days later, the academy had sent a Mage Tower construction team consisting of two Master Magicians, eight high-level Magicians, and 25 mid-level Magicians to Scorched Ridge.

Hence, the construction of Link's Mage Tower formally started.

# Chapter 212

## What a Waste of Talent

The Ferde Wilderness had become extremely muddy due to the continuous rain in the past few days.

A carriage from East Cove Higher Magic Academy was traveling unsteadily on the muddy road. Despite the added stability from a wind elemental balancing spell, it was not enough to fully offset the turbulence from the journey. Along the way, many Magicians who were physically weaker or had motion sickness threw up from the discomfort. This continued for two whole days before their destination finally came in sight. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief.

Master Greci and Master Ferdinand sat in the first carriage. Amongst the six-man council, the two of them were the youngest, with Master Greci at 58 years old, and Master Ferdinand at 54 years old. They were considered to be prodigies of their era and had attained the status of Master fairly early in life. Even so, this journey had proved to be a painful one for them as well.

As he looked at the barren camp from the window of the carriage, Greci sighed, "I feel that the king should not have given Link this territory. A title would have been enough! A genius like him should stay in the academy and put all his energy into magic research."

Ferdinand had a more jubilant character and was generally more open-minded. He laughed, "I don't mind it actually. I just find it amazing how many stones there are on this land."

"I feel you." Greci stared at the barren land where not even weeds were able to take root and once again complained, "This will be my first and last time stepping foot onto this land."

If he had to make another trip here, he might not survive the turbulent journey.

Ferdinand smiled and said, "Old fellow, we are entering the camp soon. Please watch what you say when we meet Link. Don't put him down while he is at the peak of his

enthusiasm."

Grenci was extremely grumpy from the uncomfortable journey and immediately retorted, "Why can't I say anything? Not only will I comment on this barren land, but I will also persuade him to return to the academy. It will be a complete waste of his talent to stay in this hellhole."

"Alright, alright, do what you see fit." Ferdinand knew exactly how stubborn his friend was and left him to cool down.

The carriage wheels made clacking sounds as it grazed onto the gravel. Under the monotonous rhythm, the carriages entered the Scorched Ridge.

The roads within Scorched Ridge had been treated and smoothened out upon Link's orders. It was thus a lot more comfortable to travel on. The moment the carriage entered the area, many onlookers gathered to welcome the army of Magicians. Among them, Link, who was wearing the Flame Controller Robe, stood out.

Rylai and Eliard stood beside him, while Jacker, Lucy, Gildern, Carrido and the rest of the mercenary band stood in an orderly manner behind.

The coachman pulled the carriage to a stop and Magicians walked feebly out of the carriage.

Before he alighted, Grenci whispered, "Look, he is still mixing around with those vulgar mercenaries. This is... How uncultured!"

Ferdinand was speechless. Although he knew that Grenci was a kind and caring person at heart, Grenci simply could not keep his mouth on a leash. He would often say hurtful words without first processing them in his mind.

This might be seen as being direct and sincere by some, but also offensive to others.

Upon alighting the carriage, Grenci attempted to restrain his negative feelings about this land and forced a smile on his face. As the strongest member of the six-man council, Grenci led the troop and walked towards Link. He then gave a reluctant expression and said, "Link, this place is way too barren. I have also heard that the weather is terrible. How long will it take to build a decent territory out of this wasteland?"

He still did not manage to keep it in, although he had toned it down greatly.

Link smiled apologetically and bowed. "It has been a tough journey, Master Ferdinand, and Master Grenci. I have already started the building of a road which would connect to the King's Lane. The latest completion date would be next year. Come, I've already prepared a place for both of you to rest."

It must have been a terrible experience for the two old masters to travel on the bumpy road. Link hence thought that it was natural for them to give negative comments at the start. He then turned around, signaling the Magicians to follow him into the wooden houses that they rushed to build these few days.

Along the way, Ferdinand walked towards Link and asked, "The dean had mentioned that you'd like to alter the climate using Mage Towers. Have you found an alternative?"

Link shook his head as he was not allowed to speak of the Storm Lord. He then pretended not to have a solution and said, "I have no idea as well. However, the climate these few days has been amazing. There was even spring rain yesterday! I feel that the bad climate here has been exaggerated by others. It is actually not as bad as one would think."

"Oh, that is good news." Ferdinand did not have a good understanding of the situation anyway and decided to simply believe Link.

Soon, they arrived at the wooden houses. The wooden houses had a very simple exterior. Although everything was brand new, the living conditions were still a far cry from the Mage Towers which the Magicians were used to.

Link knew this well and felt even more apologetic. "The accommodation is not very up to standard. However, I have already set up a temperature stabilizing magic circle in every room. I will also ensure that the room is kept clean. I hope everyone doesn't mind."

Grenci felt even worse after looking at the shabby wooden house. He knew though, that this was not meant to be a relaxing trip and simply endured the unsatisfactory living conditions.

Ferdinand, being himself, simply laughed, "This is already amazing. I am satisfied."

The moment he said those words, the Magicians around him could not voice out their



opinions despite having qualms about the wooden houses. Furthermore, they could not possibly change their living conditions.

Everyone then entered the room to rest as they were extremely tired from the troubling journey.

Master Grenci and Master Ferdinand were assigned to an independent wooden house. This was probably the best building in the entire camp. It had two stories and was 210 square feet. It had two bedrooms, a living room, and even a balcony on the second floor.

Before he entered the wooden house, Grenci was filled with dissatisfaction. However, the moment he stepped into the house, he could feel a warm, soothing fragrance wafting into his nose. He was immediately rejuvenated, and the fatigue in his body was dispelled instantly.

He then looked at the interior design of the wooden house. It had wooden-tiled flooring, a small wooden table with a few chairs around it, and a small bookshelf. They were all brand new and delicately crafted. The room was also extremely clean as promised, going for a minimalist design concept which calmed the senses.

Grenci was a direct person. He looked at the room with satisfaction, and a smile finally appeared on his face. "This is pretty good. It seems like Link had put in some effort."

Ferdinand nodded. He had found the temperature stabilizing magic circle and was in the midst of observing it. He then commended, "This magic circle is the work of a genius! Look at this; it seems to be a Sorlen structure which can control the temperature of the room extremely precisely. I can bet that this was Link's idea."

Grenci curiously stepped forward. After half a minute, the feeling of pity once again overwhelmed him. "As I was saying, Link seriously should stop developing this barren land and focus on his magic research. What a waste of talent."

"Alright, alright, old guy. You have repeated that many times. Let's rest. We still have to find the geographical node for the location of the Mage Tower tomorrow."

"That's true."

After the group of Magicians had settled in, Link welcomed another unexpected guest. This person was none other than the head of the Green Leaf Merchant Firm, Warter.

"Why have you come here personally? I should have already sent you the magic equipment this month through Carrido. Am I right?" Link was perplexed and asked quizzically.

Warter laughed heartily. His merchant firm had made great progress in this period, and he looked a lot more refreshed and well groomed. He smiled and said, "I heard that you are preparing to go all out in the development of your territory?"

Link laughed, "You are truly well-informed aren't you. That is true. My harbor is almost complete."

The completion of the harbor would mean that sea trade could commence. Sea trade was a hundred times more efficient than land trade routes. Link could then import huge amounts of resources for the development of the Ferde Wilderness through the sea and also export his goods through the same way. It was all within his calculations.

Warter then said, "I have met many nobles in this period doing trade. They are all extremely interested in what you are doing. Here this is a list of the specialties in each of their territories. See if they have anything that you need."

Link took the list and saw the names of at least 40 nobles. Some of them were from the Norton Kingdom, while others were from the Southern states. Below their names, were the materials and prices that they were offering. For example, Duke Beverly in the North of Hot Springs City could offer more than twenty years supply of red beech wood. Duke Garland from the West of Girvent Forest could then provide granite. Many other nobles were then willing to provide food and water, some even willing to sell slaves as labor workers.

Link carefully perused the list and found many items that he needed. He could not help but be impressed by Warter's keen sense of opportunity.

He then passed this list to his secretary and said, "Warter, this is of great help. However, I am busy with the construction of my Mage Tower and probably cannot personally be in charge of this. Please approach Lucy to discuss more details."

"No problem at all."

"Oh, one more thing," Link suddenly remembered an important issue and exclaimed. His territory was in need of citizens. Within a hundred-mile radius of his camp, the indigenous people of the Ferde Wilderness added up to merely 2000 people. This was

way too little manpower.

"Please continue," Warter immediately said. He had a hunch that this was going to be something big.

"My territory needs more manpower and a bigger population. However, the condition of the land is just too poor to attract anyone to come on their own accord..."

Before he could complete his sentence, Warter had understood the situation and continued, "You need to purchase slaves?"

"That's right, a lot of them. Do you have any connections?" Link smiled and asked. Warter was indeed a shrewd businessman. He was right when he chose to work with him.

"Do you have any requirements for these slaves?"

"Preferably young and strong."

"What about race and gender?"

"Human race would be the best. As for gender, preferably half of each... No, a bit more males than females. I need manpower for the development of my territory. I need males to do the physical labor." Another reason that Link did not mention was that he was hoping to recruit some soldiers from these slaves.

Warter fell silent for a moment before saying, "There are not many slaves present in the Norton Kingdom. Even if there were, they are all Dark Elves, which you probably would not want. However, the Southern Free Trade Alliance has loads of them. There is often friction between the nations and thus resulting in many prisoners of wars who are usually taken in as slaves. The nobles would probably be willing to trade them off for money. I will contact you again."

"Many thanks."

Warter was an extremely efficient person. He immediately left after all was done to find Lucy for negotiations.

Link was then alone in his study room, planning for the future.

He had to construct his Mage Tower, develop his territory and expand his territory's population. The gold coins required would definitely be astounding. He had to find more ways to increase his revenue.

It was probably time to bring out the anti-magic soil.

# Chapter 213

## The Unusual Soil

The merchant Warter moved very quickly. He didn't waste a single minute and began to take Link's orders and his 20,000 gold coins around the continent the same night Link had given him the instructions. He went about very excitedly because he knew that with the construction of Link's estate going on, his Green Leaf Firm would expand at an explosive rate. This would then bring him inexhaustible money. Then, his dream of building a business empire would no longer be pure fantasy.

Because of this, Warter worked very hard!

The following morning, the Magicians of the East Cove Academy also began to work on the construction of the Mage Tower. They wandered around the Ferde Wilderness, not just for fun of course, but to look for the Geodetic Nodes.

When a Mage Tower was built on the Geodetic Nodes, or in full the Geodetic Elemental Equilibrium Nodes, it would greatly stabilize the flow of the Elemental Pool inside the Mage Tower and make it much safer. This was the reason why every Mage Tower in East Cove Magic Academy was built on very stable Geodetic Nodes.

No matter how busy Link was, he'd always find time to study Vance's notes on the magic puppet. On the other hand, Eliard had been following Master Ferdinand around to learn from him.

Thus, a week passed by with everyone busy in their own work and duties.

Everyone had heard of the rumors that the climate in Ferde Wilderness was notoriously bad and that storms and rain were commonplace here. But surprisingly, in the past week, the weather had been mild and sometimes even better than the weather in the nearby Girvent Forest.

Within that week, it was pleasant and sunny for four days, and while it did rain for three days, it was merely mild drizzles, the kind that was common in spring. There hadn't been any thunderstorms or heavy rain at all.

Those Magicians who had just arrived didn't find it too odd, but the mercenaries and the original inhabitants of Ferde Wilderness who had experienced extreme weather here started to circulate the rumor that Lord Link had the "hands of God" that could control the weather.

Master Grenci was inspecting the grounds of Ferde Wilderness with an Elemental Compass in his hands. He was working in a separate section of the land from Master Ferdinand. Within the week, they'd pinpointed the locations of the Geodetic Nodes and were now determining the best place for the site of the new Mage Tower.

Just as he was walking, he suddenly heard a loud clink clank noise from afar. When he raised his head in the direction of the sound, he discovered that it was the giant magic puppet plowing the land on the hillside.

What a terrible craftsmanship from Master Weissmuller, snorted Grenci. He then prepared to walk away in the other direction with his assistants.

He'd just taken a few steps when he heard loud booms coming from behind him. After a while, there was a loud clang followed by thick billowing smoke coming from the same hillside he'd seen the magic puppet earlier.

Grenci was stunned, but he soon recovered.

"Ha! Seems like the damned magic puppet's broken down!" he yelled. "What an embarrassment the old man Weiss' craftsmanship is to the East Cove Academy!"

Although Grenci had specialized in alchemy himself, the Plowing Magic Puppet wasn't that complex, so he should be able to fix it if the cause of its breakdown was just some small problems.

"Let's go see what's going on here," he said, waving to his assistants. He then cast a wind floating spell on himself and floated over to the hillside with very little effort.

There, he saw the magic puppet hoisting itself up with its arms while its two plows were stuck deep in the ground. The soil that had been dug up behind the magic puppet looked greenish black and contained no big clumps of stones at all.

"Huh? But this is just normal soil!" said Grenci. "How did the magic puppet break down when it's only working with this? Weiss' skills can't be that bad, can it?"

He'd sneered at Weissmuller before, but in fact, Grenci had deep respect for the old master's artistry. That was why he thought the magic puppet must've broken down because it had been working on tricky terrain. But judging by the looks of it, it seemed that the magic puppet had simply just broken down for no clear reason.

He walked carefully around the magic puppet and still couldn't find anything wrong with its components. He scratched his head in wonder.

Weiss may be an unreliable old man, he thought, but he's always meticulous in his work. What's going with this magic puppet, then?

Just when Grenci couldn't wrap his head around what was happening there, a Level-4 Magician beside him suddenly pointed something out.

"Master Grenci," he said, "do you notice something odd about the soil that's been turned out?"

Grenci found the question intriguing. He kneeled to the ground and took a clump of the soil in his hand then closely inspected it.

It was greenish black, felt very sticky, and its grains were very fine. When Grenci sniffed at it, he thought it had no detectable smell at all.

Wait, something's odd here. Mana, yes, the soil seems to be able to block Mana.

Grenci put down the soil and wiped his hands clean. He then took out his wand and pointed it towards the soil on the ground.

"Fireball!" he chanted.

Just as the fireball struck the soil, Grenci could sense that its spell structure was disrupted. Even though he'd strengthened his control over the fireball, it still exploded earlier than he wanted it to.

Bang!

It wasn't a big explosion, and the fire elements simply sizzled away and disappeared. But what took Grenci by surprise was the fact that there were no signs of an explosion on the ground at all, not even a small dent. It seemed as if the soil was completely unaffected by Grenci's fireball.

"It's high-quality anti-magic soil!" exclaimed Grenci.

Now he understood why the Plowing Magic Puppet had broken down. As it plowed into the ground, the soil had interfered with the Mana and spell structure in the magic puppet's main body. It was fine for a while, but as the interference wore on, more and more anomalies accumulated in the magic puppet's body, leading to its eventual breakdown.

Although the specific properties of this soil had yet to be carefully tested, Grenci still couldn't help but sigh at the big field of at least 30 acres that had been plowed by the magic puppet.

Looks like the whole piece of land was made up of this soil, he thought. Link won't have to worry about having enough gold coins to build his estate anymore!

There were many uses for the anti-magic soil. It could be used to construct sturdy city walls, make magic puppets, build Mage Towers and so on. From now on, all Link had to do was sell the soil and he'd be able to make a big fortune for himself. This way he'd be able to complete the construction of his estate in no time at all.

Could it be God's plan?" Grenci wondered. He felt that Link's luck had just been too miraculous.

Having figured out the reasons for its breakdown, Grenci could then easily repair the magic puppet. It only took a few simple steps as well. He only needed to wipe away the anti-magic soil on the magic puppet's crucial Mana points, then add a protective cover on top of it and repair any damaged magic runes. In less than 20 minutes the giant magic puppet could then restart its work without a hitch.

"Ero, bring some of this soil back to the camp," he instructed one of his assistants, "and report this incidence to Master Link."

"Yes, Master Grenci."

An hour later, the Magician reached Scorched Ridge with the soil. Within five minutes, this greenish black soil was placed on Link's table in his study.

"Master Link," said Ero with notable excitement in his voice, "Master Grenci had told me that it possessed superior anti-magic properties." He couldn't help but get excited by this discovery as he'd seen with his own eyes how the magic puppet had turned up



this soil in the whole vast field.

Link merely looked at the soil, and there was no change in his expressions at all. It wasn't that the soil wasn't good enough for him, only that he'd expected this discovery. He took the soil sample and pretended to examine it closely. Then, he smiled and gave Ero a nod.

"This is good news indeed," he said. "At least we won't have to purchase anti-magic bricks from other people to build the Mage Tower now."

"I'm afraid you'll have much more than you need for the Mage Tower, Master Link," said Ero. He greatly admired Link's calm demeanor, and he knew that he wouldn't be able to keep his cool if he was Link. Even though Ero hadn't much to do with this anti-magic soil, he was still thrilled by its discovery as he felt that he'd just witnessed a historic moment!

Yes, with a field of this soil, Master Link could even build a magnificent city here on his estate!

Link merely nodded, then he turned to his clerk Joshua.

"Tell Carrido I'd like to see him," he instructed.

Carrido was his magic officer, and although his actual level wasn't high, Link trusted his abilities. He knew that whatever he handed to him would be settled without a problem. Currently, Carrido had become an important helper of his like Lucy and the other mercenaries. As long as the matter was related to magic, Link would always entrust it to Carrido without any hesitation.

Soon afterwards, Carrido arrived.

"My lord, what happened?" he asked.

Link pointed at the soil sample on the table and smiled.

"That giant magic puppet dug that precious thing out of the ground," he told Carrido. "Come and look at it. It's anti-magic soil."

Carrido's face immediately brightened up. All this time, he'd been working for Link and had seen and learned many things in a short span of time. He knew full well how

valuable this type of soil was.

Carrido stepped forward and examined the soil carefully.

"My lord, this is an excellent high-quality anti-magic soil," he said. "It is of very high purity. We can sell it as it is for ten gold coins per ton, or we could turn it into higher-value products and sell them at 50 gold coins per ton or more. Where was it found, my lord? I'd like to go there and take a look."

It seemed that Carrido had taken the affairs of the Ferde Wilderness as his own affairs now. Although he was still learning magic, his priorities had slightly shifted now. He found that as a magic officer, there was no need for him to have the deepest knowledge in magic. What he needed to pay more attention to was to properly carry out Link's affairs and business.

Carrido was highly optimistic about Link's future, so he was sure that as long as he carried out his duties as Link's magic officer well, his own future would be bright as well.

"He knows the exact location," said Link, pointing at Ero. "Follow him."

"Let's go, then!" said Ero enthusiastically.

Once he'd seen Carrido, an idea popped up in Ero's mind.

Maybe this anti-magic soil is my chance to shine as well, he thought.

Ero's talents could only be regarded as slightly above average. He'd turned thirty this year but was still only a Level-2 Magician. In the future, he estimated that he'd only rise up at most to Level-4, so why should he waste away in the academy? Why couldn't he come out and have a better future working with the genius Magician Link instead?

With this idea in mind, Ero eagerly took Carrido to the location where they discovered the anti-magic soil. Along the way, he kept asking questions about Carrido's roles in Link's estate.

Corrido was no fool; he knew instantly from Ero's attitude that the Magician had the idea of coming to work with Lord Link in his mind. Although he didn't mind that, he also felt slightly threatened by this.

I guess I can't neglect my studies in magic now! Carrido realized. Sooner or later there will be more and more Magicians coming here looking to work for Lord Link. If I don't upgrade my skills, then soon enough I'll be squeezed out of the core position in Lord Link's workforce. Then I'd be in trouble!

With this thought in mind, Carrido suddenly turned to another direction and headed towards Jacker's camp.

"Hey, you're going the wrong way!" said Ero, slightly confused by Carrido's actions.

"I know," replied Carrido with a smile. "But I think Lord Link would want to know the specific volume of the soil, so I should go find some mercenaries to help us make the right estimates."

Ero was impressed with Carrido's shrewdness.

His magic skills are at a lower level than mine, Ero thought. But he seems to be much more efficient and practical than I am. I have much to learn from him.

"Wait for me!" shouted Ero as he quickened his footsteps and tried to catch up to Carrido.

With these thoughts in their minds, the two people naturally worked in a more motivated state and thus got the job done much quicker too.

Seven hours later, a preliminary report about the anti-magic soil was placed on Link's desk.

"My lord," said Carrido, visibly excited, "according to our preliminary estimates, the field that contained the anti-magic soil has an area of about 2000 acres and an average depth of more than a hundred feet. We weren't able to reach the deepest limits where the soil could be found, but it is definitely more than 200 feet. The most conservative estimate of the anti-magic soil's total weight was about 70 million tons or so."

Seventy million tons wasn't a bad figure at all. If the news of this discovery spread out through the kingdom, the price of anti-magic soil would probably nosedive and would probably be sold at the same price as cabbages.

But still, even if the price dropped to a few silver coins per ton, Link would still be able to earn quite a fortune from the anti-magic soil.

Viewed from an individual's point of view, these numbers might seem large and impressive, but Link's main goal was to build a magic capital where all things related to magic would be focused here. In that case, he would still need a lot more gold coins.

"In that case," said Link, "work together with Lucy and set up an exploratory team." He decided to dig the soil and just sell it as it was. Right now, he still had about 70,000 gold coins left, but the construction on his estate was going on at a rapid pace, and his gold coins were used up at an alarming rate. He must now find a stable source of income as soon as possible.

"Yes, my lord!" answered Carrido. "I'll see to it immediately!" He then promptly rushed out of the room and went to work straight away.

Link leaned back in his chair. He wasn't thinking about the soil at all but was instead ruminating about the magnetic island he found in the sea.

The gyromagnetic iron would make a good source of income as well, thought Link. Unfortunately, the island isn't in my estate's territory. Once I've settled everything here, I must establish a navy troop and colonize the island!

It wouldn't hurt to earn more gold coins, anyway.

# Chapter 214

## The Chariot Overturns

It was impossible to hide the news that a giant mine of anti-magic soil was found in the Ferde Wilderness. It was as though a giant boulder was thrown into a small pond. The ripples would quickly spread in all directions.

For an ordinary lord—to have chanced upon a goldmine like this would definitely make them go slightly insane and drunk with happiness.

However, Link was an exception.

In his eyes, these gold coins were merely tools for the construction of his capital of magic. His final goal was to accumulate a strength powerful enough to turn the tide of any battle around. The day the anti-magic soil was discovered, Link calmly analyzed the situation and decisively mounted Dorias and headed directly to Hot Springs City, the capital of the Norton Kingdom.

The benefits from the anti-magic soil were far too great. If he chose to hoard all the benefits, he might be in trouble and end up not getting any.

For starters, King Leon would definitely demand a portion of the economic benefits. This was due to the war the kingdom was in against the Dark Elves. The war expenses had reached an all-time high, and the kingdom had never been so in need of money. If Link decided to resist this demand, his future as a Magician might be jeopardized.

Furthermore, if optimistically he could really hoard all the economic benefits for himself, his reputation would also suffer a huge blow. He would be branded as a cheapskate or a Scrooge.

How would he gain more followers then?

After some consideration, Link decided to take the initiative and head to the capital before the news spread.

As Dorias was a magical beast, he naturally could not enter the capital.

Link made Dorias stop in the Girvent Forest right outside the capital and said, "Linger around here for these next few days. Don't go too far away though. I might need to be here for a few days."

"No problem," Dorias said, and he was in fact, elated. From his knowledge, there were also creatures of the tiger species in the Girvent Forest. Although they did not belong to the family of Wind Tigers, Dorias could not care less. He then hopped away ecstatically.

Link then walked into Hot Springs City after donning a robe. Upon reaching the entrance, Link saw an eye-catching conscription notice attached to the bulletin board. A large group of onlookers was attracted to this news board as well. From their accent, one could tell that they came from other provinces.

Link decided to stop and listen to what they had to say.

"I heard that the kingdom had won many wars and many civilians have been given the title of a knight."

"I've heard similar things. A man in the neighboring village rode into his hometown on a large horse while wearing shiny battle armor. He looked amazing!"

"The king is really generous. Two gold coins for a basic salary every month while killing a Dark Elf would garner you five gold coins right away!"

After ten minutes, Link felt shaken by the common conception amongst the civilians. He realized that only the superficial and good news were being conveyed to the civilians, carefully packaged to seem alluring and enticing. Link heard no discussion on the fact that 20000 people died in the war as well as rumors of a stalemate.

The kingdom had also used gold coins as their main tactic to attract men into the army. Two gold coins per month would mean 24 gold coins per year. There were at least 100000 soldiers in the kingdom's army. This meant that the kingdom needed 200000 gold coins per month just to pay off their military expenses. Link had not even considered food, equipment, and compensation, all of which required a great amount of money as well.

Link then walked into the city and was horrified to hear even more misleading news.

"Have you heard? Those Dark Elf bastards dared to resist us! They are simply courting

death!"

"Relax! We will definitely secure victory. Just like before, the Dark Elves are merely struggling till their deathbeds."

"Oh, have you heard? There will be some Dark Elves slaves arriving in the next few days. I've heard that the Dark Elven ladies have skin as pure and white as jade. Hehe."

"Have you heard..."

The rumors all had one similarity—they were simply too optimistic. The citizens had not considered the possibility of failure. Link could finally understand Eliard's woes. Eliard's concerns were extremely accurate—the entire kingdom had fallen into a state of frenzied optimism. Link could see the kingdom as a speeding chariot on the road to nowhere, possibly even a dead end.

This scene was extremely shocking. When he reached the gate of the palace, he felt an unexpected chill on his back. He tapped it lightly with his hand and realized he had been breaking out in a cold sweat. This was not due to his fear, but due to his awareness. He had been too aware and could clearly see where the kingdom was heading towards.

Link walked forward in a trance and suddenly heard the sounds of clanging metal. The guards at the gate had blocked his path with their weapons.

"This is forbidden grounds to unauthorized personnel!" The guards frowned at Link.

Link pulled down his hood and allowed the Flame Controller Robe to emit a crimson red hue before speaking. "I am Magician Link. I request an audience with the king."

Link's expression was way too terrifying, and his name was even more so. The guards immediately bowed with respect and said, "Sir, please wait for a moment. I will report your arrival immediately."

They then ran at full speed into the palace.

Ten minutes later, the guard returned with a Kingsguard Knight following behind. The moment Link's face came into view, he was also taken by surprise and bowed, "I am Olaf, in charge of the Kingsguard Knight. Sir, please come with me. The king is waiting."

Link's achievements were made known to the entire higher echelons of the kingdom's security forces. News of a Level-9 Magician would strike fear into anyone's heart, much less the presence of one. Link simply nodded and followed Olaf deeper into the palace.

Link had walked through this path before. He followed the familiar path forward and quickly arrived at the parliament hall. There were two people in the hall. One of them was King Leon, while the other was Kingdom Magician Grinth.

In just a few months, Link felt that King Leon had gained many strands of white hair. His forehead seemed to have a permanent crease over it as well, exuding a lethargic demeanor. While Grinth looked slightly better, he was also not in good shape.

"It seems like the war in the North is going even worse than what Eliard had imagined.

Link interrupted their thoughts. "My King, Master Grinth," Link said as he walked up and gave a slight bow. As they were both Master Magicians, he did not need to give a full formal greeting.

King Leon and Grinth bowed in return. Leon then signaled to the servant at his side. With a wave of his fingers, the servant immediately took a chair and placed it behind Link.

After Link sat down, King Leon finally smiled and asked, "Master Link, I've heard that you have been busy with the development of your territory. What brings a busy person like you here today?"

Link smiled in return, "It is precisely because of my territory that I'm here."

King Leon then frowned. "What happened to the territory? Do you need more funds?"

In the past, King Leon would have been absolutely willing to support Link. However, now that the war in the North was not going well, the finances of the kingdom were in bad shape. He did not have any spare money to aid Link in his quest.

In fact, he was troubled over the military expenses for the next month.

Link could detect the minor changes in King Leon's expression. He was not at all surprised at his concerns. A war required a great deal of funding. The war in the North had already lasted for six months. Despite the kingdom's vast reserves, six months of



continuous spending would more or less empty out all the finances.

Link then took out a sample of the anti-magic soil from his dimensional pendant and passed it to the servant. He said, "Sir, this is anti-magic soil that I discovered in my territory. From the looks of it, we have it in large reserves."

"What?" King Leon was suddenly jolted out of his fatigue. "What did you say? You found anti-magic soil in your territory? A huge reserve of it as well?"

At that moment, the servant brought the sample to King Leon. He merely gave it a few glances before handing it over the Grinth.

Grinth carefully observed the soil and confirmed, "Sir, this is high-quality anti-magic soil. Such a product can probably sell for ten gold coins per ton on the market right now."

King Leon's eyes glowed at those words. He looked at Link and hastily inquired, "Master Link, you mentioned a great reserve?"

"Yes, probably around 70 million tons," Link replied.

King Leon and Grinth both gasped at this number. If this anti-magic soil could be sold for ten gold coins per ton, 70 million tons was a terrifying amount. Although the revenue from this product could not be calculated simply like that, it would definitely still be a substantial amount.

However, another problem followed. The Ferde Wilderness belonged to Link. As it was Link's territory, anything that was discovered on that land would naturally belong to him as well. The kingdom would have no say in the issue.

King Leon immediately regretted giving the entire Ferde Wilderness away back then. If he had known, he would have kept that gold mine for himself. But now that it had come to this, it was useless to dwell on it any further.

Grinth was in a better state of mind and asked, "Master Link, so the aim of your visit is...?"

Link then took out a document that he prepared and handed it to King Leon using the Magician's Hand as he said, "Sir, this is a huge piece of revenue. I know that the kingdom now requires a huge amount of wealth for the war. This is a transfer

agreement. I am willing to transfer 60% of all proceeds from the sale of this anti-magic soil to the kingdom as a form of support."

If this were during peacetime, Link would probably only transfer 20% or even none at all. If it were an ordinary war, Link would transfer 40% of all proceeds. However, as he had knowledge of the future, he knew that this was a war between the light and dark forces where the human race might even face extinction. Therefore, Link decided to transfer 60% of all proceeds to support the war in the North, hoping that they could at least hold out for a while longer.

King Leon was pleasantly shocked. Ecstasy flashed through his eyes followed by an expression of disbelief. Why would anyone in this world hand over such great wealth willingly? Sixty percent would mean that out of the 70 million tons of anti-magic soil, 40 million would belong to the kingdom. With this money, his problems with the military expenses would be settled.

Although Link had already brought the documents with his Duke's stamp on it, Leon was still in disbelief. He said, "Master, isn't this... a bit too much?"

Even if Link were to keep this a secret, the moment Leon knew of this gold mine, he would still use various means such as taxation to reap economic benefits off Link. However, now that Link was so willing to part with his wealth, King Leon felt embarrassed by his generosity.

Being offered money and getting it through sinister means were two completely different approaches after all.

Furthermore, Link had generously transferred 60% of the proceedings. He had originally only expected 40% as it was, after all, Link's territory.

Link spoke in a serious tone, "Sir, from the incident at Gladstone, I have come to realize that human lives are worth less than weeds to the Dark Elves. The war in the North holds the fate of the human race. It cannot fail. My power is limited, and I cannot give much practical help. Now that I have discovered this anti-magic soil, I naturally want to help."

Those were Link's heartfelt words. He also needed a stable environment for the development of his territory. Hence, spending some money to ensure stability and peace was actually part of his plan. They complemented each other perfectly.

King Leon was extremely grateful!

If someone merely gave slight aid to the kingdom, Leon would be happy, though he would not remember this incident for life. However, Link's offer was a timely rescue package in the midst of a financial crisis. The kingdom recently suffered a defeat in the North, and the situation was at the worst since the war.

With this huge amount of money, he could now purchase supplies from the northern countries and seek assistance from Dawn Island. He could even recruit soldiers from other races to join his army.

All in all, with such a large sum of money, his confidence in the war was restored!

King Leon stood up from his throne and felt his eyes getting moist. It had been years since he felt this way. He muttered, "Master Link, the kingdom... I am..."

He choked on his words and seemed to be unable to continue.

Link could tell how King Leon felt and immediately interrupted, "Sir, the document would be my vouch. The first proceeds will soon arrive. I have other things to take care of and shall take my leave now. Please excuse me."

Link then got up to leave without waiting for Leon's reply.

As Link was about to leave the parliament hall, Leon suddenly shouted, "Master Link, wait!"

"Anything else?" Link asked.

King Leon exchanged glances with Grinth. After Grinth nodded, Leon said, "There have been some surprises in the North. I think you need to know this."

"Oh?" Link raised his eyebrows. He knew that his generous move had paved the way for his entrance into the core layer of the Norton Kingdom.

# Chapter 215

## The Dark Serpent, the Lady of Darkness' Noose

Link returned to his seat and waited for King Leon to speak.

"Leave the hall," ordered King Leon to the attendants and courtiers.

Everyone promptly got up and left, while the last person to leave closed the great door behind them. King Leon then turned to Grinth who was still beside him.

"Master Grinth," he ordered, "let Master Link see the Magic Image."

Grinth nodded and took out a scroll. He used the Magician's Hand to push it towards Link, who then opened it up and studied it for a while. Link discovered that there were brownish red traces of blood on the scroll which showed a detailed image of a Dark Elf. The background of the image was a dark and gloomy forest, while the Dark Elf was covered all over with leather armor and was wearing a masked hood on his head. Only the Dark Elf's eyes were exposed, and he was in a lunging position which made the bloodthirst in those eyes even more pronounced.

At first glance, there didn't seem to be anything special about this Dark Elf. But as he studied it closely, Link found spotted some anomalies. The most obvious thing he noticed was the eyes, which were dark red like any other Dark Elf's. But, the more he examined it, the more clearly he could see the tiny magic runes on the pupils of those eyes. The Dark Elf's hands were strange as well—they weren't ordinary fingers but were claws instead, and the nails were as sharp as a beast's.

"That is a magic image sent back from MI3," Grinth said. "A Magician sacrificed his own life to get it."

Link was immediately stunned the moment he saw the image because he already knew what it was. Still, he maintained a calm expression.

"Is this Dark Elf powerful?" asked Link.

"Very powerful!" answered Grinth with a grave voice.

King Leon sat there on the throne with a deep frown on his face, saying absolutely nothing. This revelation came as no surprise to Link at all. In the game, the army of Norton Kingdom never won any battle where this type of Dark Elf Assassin appeared.

But Link must keep the pretense that he knew none of this.

"Please explain," he said to Grinth.

This time, it was King Leon who answered him.

"The information we got from the MI3 is that this type of Dark Elf is very fast, possesses robust and sturdy Battle Aura, and are wild and bloodthirsty in nature. Their individual strength is equivalent to a Level-6 Warrior, and they tend to act in groups. They almost seem tireless and could be active for days without rest. They specialize in assassinating our officers in the army or the Battle Mages. The MI3 had tried to set traps to capture them, but so far we'd lost more than a hundred elite members of MI3 without capturing any of them. This image is the only thing we've got for now."

Link nodded and looked down at the image again. Although the image was very clear, it still wasn't detailed enough for Link, so he cast the Eagle's Eye spell and continued to examine it even closer. While studying the image, Link raised his wand and started drawing with it in the air.

A white light appeared at the tip of Link's wand; it was as if the air was his drawing board. The wand moved in the air and left indelible light markings in its trail. About a minute or so later, Link stopped drawing with his wand, while in the air he left a circular magic seal that contained about a hundred magic runes.

Then, something strange happened.

The shadows in the darkest corner of the hall gradually expanded, and the magic lamps seemed to be shrouded in a layer of black fog, dimming the lights considerably. It now felt as if a black mist permeated through the whole hall.

King Leon was visibly disturbed by this change.

"These are... dark runes!" exclaimed Grinth in alarm. "Master Link, what's going on here?"

Link waved his hand at the magic seal to scatter the runes. He'd just used a virtual simulation technique he found in Vance's notebook. It wasn't a very powerful technique, but it did look impressive to those who'd never seen it.

Once the magic runes in the air disappeared, the black mist in the hall vanished, and everything returned to normal.

"These runes are on the pupils of the Dark Elf in this image," explained Link. "I don't know its specific roles, but judging from the bizarre effects it produced just now, we can assume that the Dark Elf's body has been transformed by dark magic in some way."

Grinth gasped.

"Do you mean to say that the Dark Elf was transformed by the occult?" he asked.

Grinth's tones had changed now when he addressed Link. He used to think that Link was just too young to have a deep understanding of the magic theories. But from what he'd seen so far, he was forced to acknowledge him as a true Master Magician and regard him as an equal.

"Yes, the occult," replied Link, "but not just the ordinary kind of occultic magic. You see, there were no concrete connections between the magic runes I've just drawn earlier. That's completely inconsistent with the universal rule in normal magic runes. It's as if their mere existence was enough to influence the dark elements in the environment, which means that they are incredibly powerful."

Grinth's face turned as white as a sheet. He could already guess the meaning of Link's explanation but was too afraid to be sure about it.

"You mean they're..."

"They're not just normal dark runes," said Link. "They're divine dark runes!" The former came from the powers of mere mortals, but the latter came from the gods of darkness, and the difference of power levels between the two was as vast as the sky!

"But if they truly are divine dark runes," said Grinth, "then only a priest can create them. How can a mortal Priest create such a powerful divine spell?"

The divine spell was powerful enough to turn a group of fighters into Level-6 Assassins. This frightening level of power was unheard of in the Realm of Light!

"That is true," continued Link, "an ordinary divine spell would require a priest as the mediator to take effect. Because priests are mere mortals, the power of divine spells would be greatly reduced. To create a Level-6 Dark Elf Assassin would require an enormous amount of power and energy that it would simply be impractical. Therefore, my guess is that they've somehow got their hands on a dark god-level device."

Link's tone was very plain as if he was simply stating dry facts from a textbook. But he'd constructed a theory with almost irrefutable logic and finally came to an earth-shattering conclusion—a dark god-level device!

If these words leaked out of this hall, they would have enough power to set off a storm of chaos in the whole Norton Kingdom or even the whole Realm of Light. In Firuman history, whenever a god-level device appeared, it would surely mean that the entire world was about to usher in a huge change that could possibly change the world forever.

So far, no one had discovered any god-level devices in the Realm of Light. The most powerful device would be the holy-level device called the Holy Grail which was preserved in a Church of Light in the holy city of Sarana.

Even though Grinth already knew that Link was right, he still wanted to cling to the last thread of hope and refused to believe it.

"But who would be willing to sacrifice so much just to bring the god-level device to this world?"

While the existence of god-level devices was undeniable, because of their unworldly power, it was against all the rules of the Firuman kingdoms to bring it to this world. Thus, maintaining the existence of such a device would require unimaginable resources and energy. Once this energy was exhausted, the god-level device would be immediately squeezed out of this plane of reality.

Thus, in the mortal world, a holy-level device was the most powerful device that could stably exist.

Link sighed. He knew who was responsible for bringing the god-level device into this world, and he knew the consequences as well.

In the game, this dark god-level device was called the "Dark Serpent, the Lady of Darkness' Noose," and it was the Spider Queen Lolth's weapon. The only reason why

it could be brought to the mortal world was because the Dark Elves had sacrificed 10,000 souls when they attacked Gladstone.

But the Change of the Bloody Moon didn't happen in this world, yet the Dark Elves still managed to bring about this god-level device. There could only be one explanation for this, that is that they've found another race of people to sacrifice!

"I think," Link whispered, "the Dark Elves must've used the sacrificial method to bring this device to the mortal world."

"Sacrificial method? To summon a god-level device?" asked Grinth, still incredulous. "But that would need at least 10,000 souls!"

Link only replied with one word.

"Gladstone."

The word sent a chill down Grinth's spine. Kin Leon refused to understand it at first, but after a while, all the blood was drained from his face, and his face looked pallid.

Yes, a year ago the Dark Elves had plotted a sneak attack on the town of Gladstone. It was an atrocious plan, but even though some people were sent to investigate the Dark Elves' true motives behind such an act, no convincing conclusions had ever been reached.

But now, Link had made step-by-step deductions through the existence of the dark runes in the Dark Elf's eyes and concluded that there must be a dark god-level device in the mortal world. Thus, he'd now found the horrifying reason behind the attack in Gladstone.

The Dark Elves had attempted to massacre the innocent souls in Gladstone and sacrifice them to summon the dark god-level device then use it to launch an all-out war on the Realm of Light.

If the Dark Elves' plan had been successful, then the Norton Kingdom would be suffering the most brutal blow by now. Any possibility of a counterattack or minor victories would merely be a joke then.

There was still one last shred of doubt in King Leon's mind.



"Master Link," he asked, "are these all just your guesses?"

Link nodded. He couldn't deny that he had absolutely no proof to back up his claims no matter how sure he was of the truth in them.

"But, Your Majesty," Link said, "there is a simple way to confirm my theory. We only need to investigate whether there were any other massacres in the North. They can't hide such a thing completely. Maybe the MI3 could find some traces of..."

Before Link could finish his sentence, King Leon slumped hopelessly into the throne. Cold beads of sweat saturated his forehead, and his eyes turned as dark and bleak as a storm. Link's words must have been a great blow to him, even though Link wasn't exactly sure why.

Link turned to Grinth for the explanation but soon found that even the Master Magician wasn't in the best condition himself. His face was ashen gray, and both of his hands were gripping his wand. It seemed as if all his senses took leave of his body and all he wished for was death.

"What's going on?" asked Link.

Grinth chuckled cynically for a long time before answering Link. His laugh sounded more like a grievous cry when Link listened to it.

"Actually," said Grinth in a hoarse and bleak voice, "we've received some reports from the North. Have you heard of the Icefield Barbarians?"

"Yes," answered Link. "They are a race of people who lived for generations on the Icefield Island and they hunt whales for a living." He'd read about them in books, but these people were primitive and did not participate much in the affairs between kingdoms, so no one paid much attention to them.

"Well," continued Grinth, "three months earlier, our army received pleas for help from these people. They said that the demons had descended upon their island and massacred most of its inhabitants. They were hoping that we'd be able to help them. No one took it seriously at the time because they were just barbarians. Besides, our army was already engaged in a plan to wage war against the Dark Elves... But who would've thought... Who would've thought that things would turn out this way!"

In other words, the Icefield Barbarians had been massacred instead of the citizens of

Norton Kingdom. As a result, the dark god-level device was here, and the Norton Kingdom had to suffer the apocalyptic consequences that were to come.

What a sign of karma at work!

King Leon rubbed the corners of his eyes with his fingers, wiping away the tears that he'd quietly shed. He then turned to Link and spoke to him almost with a tone of humility.

"Master Link," he began, almost as a plea, "do you think we have any chance to win this war?"

The young Magician had displayed incredible wisdom and insight in front of his eyes. He'd managed to guess the Dark Elves' terrible plots with the minimal number of clues and infer the existence of a dark god-level device while staying calm and collected through it all.

The existence of such a figure made King Leon slightly hopeful. Perhaps there was some truth to the rumors that he was the God of Light's Chosen One. Perhaps this young man could one day save the Realm of Light.

Link didn't say whether they could win or not.

"Your Majesty," said Link, waving the blood-stained scroll that contained the image of the Dark Elf in his hand, "the future cannot be predicted. Whether we win or lose depends on our present efforts. We haven't yet reached the lowest point, so, first of all, we must capture the Occult Dark Elf Assassin and study its weakest points. Then we'll be able to handle the dark god-level device. Do you agree with me, Your Majesty?"

"But these Dark Elves are too strong," said King Leon, "and their combat skills are at an unimaginable level. They work in groups, and they move incredibly fast. Even the Dawn Swordsman Karnose couldn't capture any of them."

The Dawn Swordsman Karnose, a Level-8 Warrior, was the strongest Warrior in the Norton Kingdom and perhaps in the entire human realm. He'd always been stationed in the palace, but judging from the king's words, he must've been sent to the battlefield in the North too. This just proved how dire the situation had become for the Norton Kingdom!

Link interlaced his fingers in front of his chest and fell into silent contemplation for a

few seconds.

"I will go north myself," said Link finally.

"Huh?" King Leon and Grinth looked at each other in shock. Ever since defeating the Level-8 demon Tarviss, Link was recognized by the whole Realm of Light as the most powerful Battle Mage. What a formidable team they would make if he could work together with the Dawn Swordsman!

It could be said that if these two couldn't succeed after working together, then no one else in the whole realm could either!

"When can you make the journey, Master Link?" asked Grinth.

"I would need a week to get my affairs in order before leaving," Link answered.

"Of course! Of course!" said the king, he'd stood up in excitement by now. "Please let me know what I can do for you, Master Link. I'll do my best to satisfy you!"

"Then please make sure no one knows of my movements and whereabouts, Your Majesty," said Link.

Link was hesitant to go north himself, but it seemed that Norton Kingdom's army was about to collapse in defeat in front of his eyes. Link could no longer stay out of the action and do nothing at this point.

# Chapter 216

## Crafting a New Magic Wand

After exiting the parliament hall, Link followed behind Grinth and went straight towards the Mage Tower in the palace. He wanted to borrow the enchanting chamber in the Mage Tower to craft a new wand.

In the Norton Kingdom, the strongest Mage Tower would be the Heaven's Thorn, which lay in the East Cove Higher Magic Academy. The one next in line would be the royal palace Mage Tower which Link was heading to.

This Mage Tower belonged to the royal Abel family and was situated in the heart of the capital. The extent of this Mage Tower was thus directly related to the reputation of the royal family. It was extravagantly decorated with a famous rooftop garden at the top of the spiraling tower. Flowers on the rooftop garden would be changed every month to ensure that they stayed in season and in bloom.

The Mage Tower hence got its name, the Miracle Garden.

After entering the Mage Tower, Link saw many royal Magicians clad in silver white robes. These Magicians were all at least Level-3 in strength and had a complacent expression on their face, especially those who were young. Despite their respectful bows towards Link, a trace of disdain could be seen in their eyes.

That expression seemed to be saying, "While I am inferior now, I might become stronger than you in a few years."

All of them seemed to scoff at the Storm Lord sword that hung from Link's waist, their glances deliberate and arrogant.

A Magician carrying a sword around—what an invalid.

This was understandable.

Magicians who were able to become official Royal Magicians were all genius in their own right. Even students from East Cove Higher Magic Academy looked forward to

becoming a member of the Miracle Garden one day.

It would be even more amazing if one were young. Coupled with their ambitious attitude, it was completely normal to behave that way after seeing Link. Link did not feel anything from their gazes.

Grinth, on the other hand, was afraid that Link would be unhappy. When they met the third arrogant young Magician, he whispered, "Master Link, they are all young people and may be a bit unthoughtful. But they are all good people at heart."

As he spoke, he seemed to have forgotten that Link was actually even younger. In fact, many Magicians were still apprentices when they were Link's age.

Link merely smiled and said, "No harm. It's just a small matter."

Under the defiant and brazen gazes, Link entered the main enchanting chamber of the rooftop garden. The enchanting chamber had many professional tools. Grinth took Link around the enchanting chamber while introducing their facilities. He saw a spectrometer, an intricate Higgs Field machine arm, an extractor, and many other high-end enchanting tools. He was extremely satisfied.

Grinth introduced with pride, "This is the best enchanting chamber in the entire kingdom. Even Weissmuller's Cauldron of the Gods back in East Cove Higher Magic Academy cannot compare. Let's not even talk about the Southern Magician Alliance. Their enchanting skills are simply inferior."

This was the truth. However, this did not mean that the South was useless. There was a saying, "Intricate Enchanting of the North, Euphoric Alchemy of the South." They simply focused on different aspects of magic.

"Then, I will get started," Link said.

"Alright, please get busy. If you require any materials, as long as we have it in our stores, I will retrieve it for you. Even if we don't have them, we will procure it for you as soon as possible."

Link nodded, "I will inform you in due time."

Grinth then shut the door to the enchanting chamber behind him.

Complete silence then descended onto the enchanting chamber. Link did not proceed to craft the wand immediately. He first carefully took out all the materials he had from the dimensional pendant—the Fire Star Thorium, the Hedel High-Grade Fire Crystal, Broken Moon Gold and ten other rare materials. Apart from the Fire Star Thorium which was a gift from Lady Fortuna Elin, the rest of them were from Vance's treasured collection.

Link then took out a scroll and an exquisite quill before recollecting himself and starting on a design for his new wand.

The situation in the North was changing rapidly. He thus only gave himself one week of preparation time. It was impossible for him to learn another strong spell in this time. Hence, in order to improve his strength as much as possible, he could only improve the weapon he was using.

The weapons that Magicians used were none other than magic wands. The Starcatcher had already been phased out ever since Link attained far greater powers. It was time to craft a new one.

Link quickly got into a state of concentration and squinted his eyes as he poured his creativity into the design. While he was designing the wand, the properties of the various materials he would be using, the magic notes of the various masters in the academy, the unparalleled wisdom in Vance's magic books, and the impossibly difficult space-time thesis that he was writing flashed through his mind.

Link's mind was just like a huge melting pot, and his knowledge was the various ores that were being thrown into this incinerating solution that was Link's burning wisdom. These ores were quickly melted and fused together, eventually forming a flawless piece of alloy.

Time passed in the enchanting chamber as Link sat there seemingly motionless. After 30 hours, Link finally put down the last stroke onto the paper.

Looking at the design of the wand on the scroll, Link sighed, "It's done."

For an ordinary enchanter, the enchanting process was probably the most important part of crafting a wand. However, for a master enchanter like Link who wanted his wand to achieve the Epic rank, the most important process was the design.

After the design was done, all that was left was the physical labor.

He was still lacking in a few materials. Link hence approached Grinth and gave him a list of materials that he needed. Grinth stared at the list as his eyebrows raised ever so slightly. He did not give an answer right away. The problem lay not so much in the price of the material, but the difficulty of even finding some of them.

"Is there a problem?" Link asked.

"Not a problem. Please give me a moment while I procure them for you." Grinth left quickly. This concerned the fate of the kingdom, and he would make sure Link got all the materials he needed.

After concentrating for over 30 hours, Link was feeling slightly tired. He took the time to rest as Grinth was looking for the materials. He cast an Elemental Healing spell on himself before rubbing his forehead gently. He then closed his eyes and sat in a chair for a short nap.

Four hours later, Grinth came back breathlessly with a beautiful wooden box in his hand. "Master Link, I have finally gathered the materials. Please take a look."

Link opened the wooden box and did a comprehensive check. He then nodded in satisfaction. "That is very complete. Thank you."

"That's nice to hear. Please continue," Grinth panted as he said. He was already over 60 years old. All that running he had to do while procuring these materials had taken a toll on him.

Link once again did not start immediately after returning to the enchanting chamber. He decided to first familiarize himself with the tools that he had not used before. Although they were slightly more comprehensive than the ones he was used to, they operated on the same basic principles. Link tested them out separately and only started after he was fully familiar with their workings.

Each material was analyzed, deconstructed, and treated with magic. Link was extremely focused the entire time, his eyes unblinking and his hands steadily maneuvering across the different materials. His movements were so coherent that it felt like a stream of flowing water.

As time slowly passed, the wand started taking form.

Link had completely lost track of time. Just when he felt he was at his physical limit,

the magic wand in his hand emitted a slight tinkling sound. Following which, a crimson light enveloped the wand, and many flaming runes appeared in the air.

The runes quickly multiplied and spun at high speed around the wand. They revolved faster and faster till one could no longer see the runes individually. They now looked just like circles of light circling outside the wand. In this dome of light, the wand floated in the air and buzzed with a soothing sound. A myriad of crimson brilliance then started emanating from the wand. These lights looked like silk threads and multiplied around the wand, eventually forming a pupae of flames.

Link seemed to be completely unsurprised by this phenomenon. He merely stepped back and observed the scene with satisfaction. This phenomenon lasted for a whole minute before the pupae of flames suddenly burst open. A flaming crystal wand then appeared in the air.

The whole wand seamlessly fused together and had a translucent, royal texture to it. Countless fire runes circulated within the internal structure of the wand and a fine burst of red light would occasionally appear on the exterior. One look at the wand was enough to impress anyone.

It was simply gorgeous!

The amalgamation of countless rare and treasured materials together with Link's skills and wisdom had resulted in an Epic wand bound to shake the World of Firuman to its very core.

"Oh?" a surprised voice rang in Link's mind. It was the voice of the sword spirit of the Storm Lord. He continued, "This wand is not too bad. It is pretty interesting."

After the Storm Lord commented on the wand, he then asked, "I have a question."

"Speak". Link rubbed his forehead, feeling slightly lethargic.

"I have at least seen tens of thousands of people from your territory all the way to the capital. However, I have not found a single person strong enough. In fact, they are all weaker than you. What happened to this world?"

Link took some time to reply due to his fatigue and said, "I have no idea as well. If you want answers, look for them yourself."



"Alright then. What a peculiar era." After the sword spirit said this, he stopped talking for good.

Link then held his wand in his hand. The moment he touched the wand, new information appeared in his field of vision.

Player has crafted an Epic wand. Omni Points + 100. Please name the wand.

Link thought for a moment and said, "Burning Wrath of Heavens."

He then saw a flash before information of his new wand appeared in front of him.

Burning Wrath of Heavens

Quality: Epic

Effect 1: Increases strength of elemental spells by 150%.

Effect 2: Increases the speed of concentrated fire elements by 200%.

Effect 3: Able to activate the Flaming Surge effect. Under this effect, the caster can choose to deplete 1500 Mana Points to instantaneously cast a Level-7 fire-element spell. The strength of this spell will be increased by 300%. (The charging time for this effect will be ten Level-5 fire elemental spells)

(Note: The work of Master Enchanter Link)

This was a wand that Link crafted especially for himself. Effect two would be used to replace the effects of the Domingo Crystal, while effect three would ensure that Link had a powerful spell in his arsenal to tide him through a crisis. As long as he could successfully cast ten fire elemental spells that were above Level-5 in strength, the Flaming Surge effect would be recharged. This effect was even stronger than the Dark Arbiter staff that Morestern carried!

As he felt the warm, mellow touch of the wand, Link let out a sigh of satisfaction. This was really a priceless treasure!

Link walked out of the enchanting chamber after resting for a moment. After walking only a distance of 30 feet, Link saw a white-haired old man staggering up the stairs. It was not Grinth, but Anthony, the dean of the East Cove Higher Magic Academy.

"Dean?" Link was slightly puzzled.

# Chapter 217

## We Can't Afford to Lose You!

A few months had gone past since Link last met the Dean Anthony. His hair had gone much grayer, and that natural charisma and dignity of his had clearly been somewhat weathered as well. Even his back was slightly bent now, revealing his old age as it never used to.

Obviously, the terrible war in the North had not only plagued the minds of King Leon and Grinth alone—even the dean of East Cove Academy had now sunk into deep melancholy because of it.

Because he walked with the aid of magical prosthetics, Anthony moved very slowly.

"I heard you're going north," said Anthony.

Link wasn't surprised that the dean would know this. He was an important figure in the kingdom, while Link had been a student of the East Cove Academy. Naturally, Anthony had the right to know of his decision to go north.

Anthony walked up to Link and was about to say something when he was suddenly distracted by the wand in Link's hand.

"What is that?" he asked.

"It's my new wand," answered Link. "I call it the Burning Wraths of the Heavens." He then handed over the wand for the old dean to inspect.

Anthony carefully took the wand into both of his hands and examined it very closely. After ten long minutes, he gently stroked the wand and turned back to Link.

"This has to be the most powerful wand to be created in the last hundred years," he said softly, full of awe. "The Burning Wraths of the Heavens—what an apt name!"

He then paused in silence for a few seconds before continuing.

"May I have the honor to add a suffix to its name?" asked the dean.

In normal circumstances, it would be an honor to the student if the dean bestowed a name to their wand. But now, the tables had turned. Anthony felt that it would be a great honor for him if he were allowed to name a wand so powerful from such an outstandingly talented student.

To Link, though, a name was just a name. This wasn't the first epic-quality wand he'd created, and it wouldn't be the last either. What the dean asked for was but a small request to him.

"Dean Anthony," he said, pointing to the smooth surface of the wand, "you can engrave the name of the wand right here."

Anthony was instantly glad to hear it. He thought silently for a while before activating the Higgs field and carefully carving elegant runic characters on the wand. There were 13 runes in total, and the full name of the wand was "The Burning Wraths of the Heavens, Scepter of the Flame Controller."

Once the dean was done, Link looked at the wand again through the gaming system. He then noticed that the wand's name had now changed to "The Burning Wraths of the Heavens, Scepter of the Flame Controller."

Link thought the name sounded portentous enough. He liked it very much.

"I heard you're going north," said Anthony again after returning the wand to Link. "I'd planned to give you my wand to use on the battlefield, but now it seems that it would be unnecessary. Burning Wraths is a much better weapon for you."

There were powerful wands, and there were weak wands, but the best wand for a Magician wasn't necessarily the most powerful one. What was most important was that the wand suited the spellcaster's individual strength. For instance, if Link were given a wand that specialized in secret spells, then it would be useless no matter how well-made it was.

"But I have something else for you," continued the dean with a smile. "Here, it's a vial of medicinal potion."

As he spoke, Anthony slipped out a clear vial that was glowing red. Through the crystal surface, Link could see that the vial contained a similarly red potion inside it. What

was more peculiar was how the potion seemed to exert a mysterious kind of pressure on Link as soon as the dean took it out.

"What is it?" asked Link. This time, it was his turn to be surprised. He did, in fact, know what kind of potion it was, but he just couldn't believe that the dean would be so generous to him.

"This is an epic-quality potion called the Red Dragon Queen's Blessing," said the dean. "The previous dean, Level-9 Master Magician Ambron once saved the whole race of the Red Dragons more than 400 years ago. This potion was the gift the Red Dragon Queen bestowed upon him. There were three vials of this potion in total. 230 years ago, the Necromancer Andrew had launched an army of the undead to attack the Realm of Light, so one vial was used then. 156 years ago, the dragon, Aloz from the North went on a rampage, so the second vial was used up. Now there's only one bottle left, and you should use it to protect yourself in the North."

As the dean explained, a notification appeared on the interface.

Red Dragon Queen's Blessing

Quality: Epic

Effects: After drinking this potion, the drinker will possess the essence of the Red Dragon and enter the Red Dragon Magician state for ten minutes.

Red Dragon Magician State: Instant spellcasting for all elemental spells of Level-7 and below. 500% increase in power of all elemental spells below Level-9.

Side Effects: Once the Red Dragon Magician State ends, the drinker of this potion will experience an elemental rejection state where the Magician will not be able to cast any elemental spells. This effect will last for a year.

(Note: Have a taste of the dragon's power when you drink the potion!)

These effects... This potion was simply like a cheat code in games!

However, the side-effect of this potion was a bit harsh as well. For a Magician who specialized in fire-elemental spells like Link, not being able to use elemental spells for a year would mean that he would be completely powerless and vulnerable for a whole year.

But it would still be worth it though. Because, in that ten minutes when the potion took effect, it would be possible for a single Magician to completely reverse the power balance in a war and change a near defeat into a victory!

In the face of such a powerful potion, Link felt slightly hesitant to receive it.

"But Dean Anthony," he protested, "this potion is too powerful for a Level-6 Magician like me. I'm afraid that I'll only be wasting its immense potential."

"No, you won't waste it at all," said Anthony, shoving the vial of potion into Link's hand. "Take it first, then listen to me."

Link had no other choice but to take the potion with both of his hands at the dean's insistence. He could feel a burst of numb sensations in his palm as he held the vial. That was a testament to the potion's incredible power.

"This potion has been stored in the Alchemist Tower all these years," the dean explained. "The release of Tarviss had happened so unexpectedly that I didn't have the time to take it. But now when I think about it, drinking this potion wouldn't have been enough for me to defeat Tarviss anyway."

Once he got to this point, he turned to look straight into Link's eyes, and his tone turned graver as it had never been before.

"You saved the East Cove Magic Academy, Link," said the dean. "You are qualified to use this potion. You'll be encountering great dangers when you're in the North. What I mean to say is this—any Warriors can die, even the elite ones. As a matter of fact, it wouldn't matter much if the Dawn Swordsman Karnose died in battle. But you must live, Link! We cannot afford to lose you! You are Bryant's true successor who will decide the fate of humanity. The kingdom needs your strength now, so I can't stop you from going north, but I can still do my best to give you more power."

Finally, the old dean patted Link's shoulder.

"You are the pride of East Cove Academy, Link," he said. "You must live!"

Link didn't know how to respond to this, so he merely nodded.

"I will do my best," he said briefly.

"I believe in you," said the dean. He was about to reach out his hand to stroke Link's head but changed his mind suddenly as he thought it might not be appropriate. So the dean just turned around and left.

Because the magical prosthetics weren't very flexible, the dean walked very slowly and quite awkwardly. Link watched the dean's back as he slowly walked away from him and he gripped the vial of potion in his hand tightly.

This was the real world now, not just a game. These responsibilities on his shoulders were very real too, and they felt immensely heavy.

After standing in the hallway for a long while, Link kept the potion in his storage pendant and walked out of the Miracle Garden. He then saw someone waiting for him in an East Cove Academy carriage outside the garden. When he approached the carriage, a woman climbed out of it—it was Herrera.

The Light Angel looked weak and as pale as a sheet as she approached Link.

"I hear you're going north," she said. "This is for you."

Link took it and discovered that it was a rune stone. The rune stone's surface glowed in a milky white light while pronounced Mana waves lingered in the air around it. This made Link's hair stand on end. He knew that the rune stone contained a terrifying amount of power in it.

"If... if you get caught in danger and are unable to escape," whispered Herrera in Link's ear, "activate this stone, and you'll find an endless amount of light energy in there."

Link could clearly feel Herrera's weakness from that distance. He knew that she must've paid a great price in order to get him this rune stone.

"I understand," said Link simply with a nod of his head.

Herrera said nothing more. She just waved her hand at Link and walked back to the carriage. Link could see that Dean Anthony was sitting in the same carriage too. It seemed that they'd both heard the news of him going north and came together.

The carriage soon drove away from the palace. Link's eyes followed it all the way until it went out of his view.

Then, Grinth walked up to Link from inside the palace.

"It's been five days now, Master Link," he said. "Is there anything else that you need to prepare?"

"I must go back to my estate," said Link, quickly regaining his senses. "I'll have to make some arrangements there. I'll head up north straight away in two days and meet up with the Dawn Swordsman there."

"I see," said Grinth with a nod. He then gave Link a formal Magician's bow and said, "May the Norton Kingdom's glory shine on forever!"

"May the Norton Kingdom's glory shine on forever!" answered Link.

Then, a royal carriage rode up beside Link. He climbed into it and left the royal palace.

An hour or so later, Link reached the outskirts of Springs City.

"Stop the carriage," he shouted to the coachman. "My mount is waiting for me here."

"Yes, Master Link," said the coachman reverently. He then promptly put the carriage to a halt.

Link got off and went straight into the Girvent Forest. He probably walked for about a mile before taking out his wand and pointing it to the sky and cast the Level-2 spell Wind Blade. Five minutes later, there was a sound of hurried footsteps. Soon after, Dorias appeared.

"Hey, what took you so long this time?" asked the tiger. On his face was a deep and contented smile.

Link almost laughed at the sight, as he knew what it meant.

"Did you find a tigress?" asked Link.

"I did," answered Dorias, "but I was just playing around. Those ladies were too boring for me."

"..." Link was speechless for a while. He then climbed onto the tiger's back and said, "You won't get cold feet once we return to Scorched Ridge, will you?"



"Are you kidding me?" said the tiger. "I, the mighty Dorias, never get cold feet and never—"

Before he finished his sentence, he tripped up on a mound of dirt in front of him. He almost toppled over but regained his balance just in time. Link quickly cast a floating spell on him which saved both of them from getting flung out into the distance.

"Oops, my bad! Hahaha..." said Dorias, slightly embarrassed. He then stopped boasting for the rest of the journey.

After running in the forest for about half an hour, Link suddenly sensed a strange aura from a particular direction.

"Let's head in that direction," he told Dorias. "It seems like there's a friend waiting for us there."

Dorias quickly turned a corner and ran in that direction for half a mile. They then reached a clearing in the middle of the forest, and there stood Eleanor clad in her black dress leaning against a tree trunk with both her hands clasped on her chest.

She took a glance at Dorias and was a little surprised, but her eyes quickly turned to Link, and she smiled warmly.

"I hear you're going to the North?" she asked.

"How did you know?" Link was astounded. He'd expected Anthony and Herrera to find out; but how did Eleanor get wind of this news?

"Have you forgotten that I'm a Magician specializing in secret spells?" replied Eleanor. "The wind in the forest, the currents of the stream, the songs of the bird, the souls of the dead... I hear all the stories they tell. Anyways, here, take this."

Eleanor threw a scroll at Link.

"It's a Dimensional Scroll," she said. "If you're in grave danger, open the scroll, and it will let you enter the World of Shadows. You must be careful when you use it to escape, though. There are nightmarish creatures in that world that you must watch out for."

This scroll might really come in handy. Link took the scroll and kept it in his storage pendant straight away.

"Thank you," he said.

"And now you owe me a magic gear," said Eleanor. "Create a storage pendant for me."

"No problem." Link snapped his fingers and gently patted Dorias' neck. He then picked up his speed and headed towards the Ferde Wilderness.

After running for a while, Dorias could no longer hold his tongue.

"Are you going to the North, Link?" he asked. "But the battlefield can be really dangerous!"

"I must go. I have no other choice," said Link.

Dorias fell into silence for a while.

"Then... I'll go with you," he finally said. "Don't expect me to join in the war, though. I'll only be there to take you away if you are in danger."

"That's good enough," said Link. Naturally, he wouldn't mind having another means to escape danger.

When he came to think of it, Link realized that he now had four great helpers. Now, he felt that even if he were specifically targeted by the Dark Elves, he'd probably still end up safe and sound.

Dorias was extremely fast. After little more than an hour, he'd covered the distance of about 150 miles. Link could now see the outlines of the Scorched Ridge terrains.

"Don't go back there yet," said Link suddenly. "Turn that way. I'm going to meet an old guy."

Although he now had many ways to protect his life, Link was still a bit uneasy. He still wanted to meet the thousand-year-old Lich Vance and ask for his suggestions.

He directed his Mana into the communication rune stone, and within ten seconds there was a response from the stone. Link sensed its message for a few seconds; then, he pointed his finger in the air.

"Turn that way," he told Dorias.

# Chapter 218

## I Have to Let Her Rescue You

Vance had witnessed the downfalls and successes of many heroes in the over 1000 years he had been alive. He was truly the one that had experienced fully what life in Firuman could bring.

Link naturally thought of consulting this old experienced undead before he faced the Divine Gear.

Following the instructions of the transmission rune, Link walked all the way to the seaside before heading north along the coast. After he passed by the harbor that was near completion, he had to run another three miles before he finally found Vance in a small cave at the edge of the seaside.

He was sitting on a boulder in front of the cave and seemed to be thinking about something. From afar, he merely looked like a deserted corpse.

Dorias did not recognize him. The moment they reached the cave, he laughed and said to Link, "Look at this skeleton! How interesting! He was able to maintain this posture after being dead. I'll blow his head off."

Dorias then prepared his claws and was about to use Vance's skull as a ball.

The moment his claws were raised, a bolt of lightning appeared in the sky. With a terrifying rumble, the lightning struck directly at Dorias claws. Dorias then retracted his claws due to the intense pain and stared at the skeleton with disbelief. "Strange. There is something going on with this skeleton!"

Vance then awakened as the Flame of the Soul in his eyes lit up. He then looked at Dorias with teasing eyes and smiled as he said, "Link, is this your pet? It seems interesting enough."

Dorias wanted to rebut but was harshly interrupted by Link.

Link jumped down from his back and was extremely straightforward, "Old guy, I need

a favor from you."

"If someone like you says so, I presume it must be real trouble. What is it?" Vance patiently replied.

Link then reported the findings of the royal palace in detail, from the abnormal Dark Elves to the Dark Divine Gear and finally, his decision to go northwards. He then said with no confidence, "Honestly, I don't know if I can do it."

Vance did not have any expression on his face after hearing that. He nodded his head slowly. "This is truly a troubling issue. Please give me a moment."

Vance lost his usual casual and even slightly insane demeanor, sinking into his vortex of thoughts and concerns. This state lasted for more than half an hour before he finally said, "The Dark Elves worship the Spider Queen Lolth. This god is known for using a whip as her weapon. The name of this weapon is the Dark Serpent, Lady of Darkness' Lasso. If the Dark Elves have truly gotten Divine Gear, it could only be this one."

Link knew that he had found the right person the moment he heard those words!

He then asked, "Do you know the exact nature and properties of this Divine Gear?"

Although Link knew the properties of this exact Divine Gear in the game, the likelihood that there would be differences was high. For example, the Storm Lord sword in his hand had starkly different stats than the one in the game. It was a lot more overpowered in the World of Firuman. Link had not trusted the in-game stats that he remembered ever since that incident. If he continued to do so, he would meet his end one day without even knowing the reason why.

Vance shook his head. "That is a weapon of the gods. How would a mortal like me know its exact nature? However, this is not the first time the Dark Serpent has appeared in this world. There have been a few legends connected to it."

"Please tell me." Link was humbled.

"Please give me some time." Vance once again descended into a meditative state and took another half an hour before he finally opened his mouth. "It was rumored that the Dark Serpent was extremely poisonous and could release highly toxic substances. For the people whom it recognized, it could transform them into the perfect Warriors. However, this venom is extremely lethal to its enemies. If an enemy were to be afflicted

with the poison, there would be no possibility of survival, and even his soul would be disintegrated."

"That powerful?" Dorias instinctively shrank behind Link.

Vance continued, "Alas it is just a weapon. After entering this world, there must be a host. While this host would be controlled by the weapon, they would also be empowered to a terrifying extent. It was rumored that only Dark Elves who carry the royal blood of the Silver Moon could withstand the power of the Divine Gear. They would then become unparalleled Warriors."

"How strong would that be? Legendary status?" Link was horrified.

"I don't know." Vance shook his head.

Link was slightly disappointed. However, another voice rang in his mind, "Not legendary status, merely the strength of a Level-9 professional. How can a puppet ever reach legendary status?"

This voice belonged to the sword spirit of the Storm Lord sword.

Are you sure? Link asked.

The sword spirit was infuriated, "What do you mean! This is the truth! I have experienced at least ten times more things than the skeleton in front of you! I have even fought against the Dark Serpent before!"

Link was suddenly curious. Who won?

The sword spirit fell silent for a moment before replying, "I'm too lazy to tell you."

Link was, however, desperate to know the true extent of the Dark Serpent's power. "Wait, you said that you once fought against it. Please tell me what kind of power it wields and how to defend against it!"

There was no reply. This sword spirit would come and go as he wished; his behavior was completely unpredictable. After asking a few more times in his mind and getting no response, Link could only give up.

In this period, Vance had also not been giving any more information. Link guessed that

that was probably all of Vance's knowledge and said, "Old guy, I will then be returning to my territory. Will you be bored staying here?"

Vance shook his head and spoke with a calming voice, "I face the sea every day and enjoy the beautiful view of the sunset and birds diving into the water. Please don't worry about me."

"Oh, then goodbye." Link mounted onto Dorias and went back to his territory to make some final arrangements.

After making sure that Link had gone away, Vance immediately jumped down from the boulder he was sitting on and ran back into his cave. In the cave lay Nana's destroyed body. Originally, he had agreed to modify Nana together with Link after Link had gotten some basic knowledge about constructing magic puppets.

Therefore, Vance had put off touching the magic puppet all this while.

However, the situation was different.

As he entered the cave, Vance could not help but reprimand, "This young guy is truly arrogant. To think that he wants to fight against the Divine Gear—he will definitely be dead!"

However, after that outburst, Vance sighed helplessly, "The appearance of the Dark Serpent is bound to be a sweeping disaster for the entire world. Who would be able to escape this tragedy? Will I be able to live through it? If one is unwilling to become a puppet of darkness, it will only be a matter of time before they are dead..."

He walked towards Nana and squatted down to inspect the damage done. After a long while, he then took out his Dark Arbiter wand and started casting a transformation spell.

He already knew the reason for Nana's outburst and could easily repair her. The only reason why he didn't do it sooner was due to the promise he made with Link.

But now it seemed like he had to.

"Young guy, don't blame me for not waiting. If I don't repair her in time, you will definitely be dead going to the North all alone. I am letting her save your sorry ass."

Vance had once spent 20 years creating this magic puppet and was thus familiar with every single one of her structures. He repaired Nana at an astounding speed.

Under the effect of the transformation spell, Nana's wounds healed, and the frozen pair of clear eyes started regaining consciousness.

A crisp, clear voice appeared from Nana once again, "Nana is starting up... Memory damage... Nana has no more targets... Nana has no more targets..."

"It's still too early to wake up. Sleep and don't cause trouble." Vance then lightly patted her head with his hand enveloped in white light. With a light touch, Nana once again fell into a deep slumber.

Link was, of course, unaware of Vance's plan. He had already returned to his territory.

Not far away, the foundation of the Mage Tower was already being set. Further away, one could even see a tall giant magic puppet plowing the land.

Scorched Ridge was also unusually crowded. One could see that the path leading towards the Girvent Forest was filled with pedestrians ten times the normal amount. Some of them were carrying baskets and holding their children's hands. Many of them seemed to be moving as a family. From the number of items they were carrying, they appeared to be moving locations. Many makeshift tents used for camping purposes were also set up in the area around the Scorched Ridge.

Link had been too busy to notice this previously. Now that he had realized this, he felt strange.

Dorias was surprised and said, "That's a lot of people."

"Let's take a look."

# Chapter 219

## The Lord's Absolute Power

The appearance of Link riding a 13-feet-tall giant tiger really shocked the people who came across them. Some ordinary people went timid and stopped in their tracks, some stepped slowly backwards, and some even cried out in fear.

Fortunately, Dorias made an effort to look as gentle and non-threatening as possible. He walked along the road in an orderly manner and shook his head gently from time to time. After a while, the people there slowly calmed down and got a little less nervous around him.

Soon, they could hear different voices talking about the giant tiger.

"Lord of Light!" exclaimed one voice. "Look at how big the tiger is! It can easily swallow a whole cow!"

"Is the lord sitting on the back of the tiger?" asked one voice.

"Oh my god!" said another voice. "Look at how his body is shrouded in flames! He's terrifying!"

"Will he chase us away?"

Link listened closely to the words spoken by these people. His eyes scanned the whole area slowly to catch every detail.

He found that these people on the road were all wearing tattered clothes. Their faces were pallid, and their bodies were weak. They don't look like free country folks who came here looking for work from the Girvent Forest. Rather, they seemed to have dragged their families and their meager belongings to escape from something.

Are they refugees from the North? Link wondered. No, it can't be. Norton Kingdom's army has been winning the battles in the North, haven't they? The recent stalemate is mostly happening in the Black Forest. How could there be refugees, then? The clothes these people wore doesn't make it look like they're from the North either...



Besides, even if there were refugees from the North, they'd first appear in the Girvent Forest up north, wouldn't they? Why come to Ferde Wilderness first instead?

Just then, Gildern appeared. He was now the scout commander in the area and was responsible for investigating the happenings around this place.

Link hopped down the tiger's back and walked over to Gildern.

"What's going on here?" he asked. "Where did they come from?"

"My lord," Gildern hurriedly answered. "I was just about to report this to you."

"Go on, then," Link said as he walked into the territory with Gildern following behind him.

"These are the refugees from the Delonga Kingdom in the South, my lord," Gildern explained. "The Delonga Kingdom and its western neighbor, the Southmoon Kingdom are now at war. The Delonga army has lost many battles and even more lives and territories. As a result, these people had to make their escape and run from the occupied land, my lord."

Two kingdoms in the South were at war? Link's chest suddenly tightened as he came to a realization.

It's already happened! Link thought.

At this point in the game, because the Norton Kingdom was too preoccupied with the war with the Dark Elves in the North, it had no time to control the minor southern kingdoms. At this point, the Syndicate ran wild in the South, and they kept fanning the fire of disputes between the southern kingdoms to provoke them into conflict. In the end, the whole southern part of the continent descended into chaos and bloodshed.

In this world, things were slightly better, although there seemed to be the same trend happening in the undercurrent of events. Link was afraid that history would soon repeat itself again now.

Link let out a long sigh and thought of Elin's words.

The sun will soon sink under the horizon.

Link knew that he had no power to control what happened in the South now, but he was still puzzled by some questions.

If they wanted to escape, he wondered, why didn't they take refuge in the deeper parts of the Delonga Kingdom? Why come here?

His estate was known across the continent as a bleak and barren place. What did they expect to find here? Were they going to eat dust to survive? Besides, surely the Delonga Kingdom wouldn't be happy to know that their citizens had escaped to the Norton Kingdom, would they?

Fortunately, Gildern had figured everything out from his inquiries.

"This must have something to do with Warter, my lord," he said. "Warter had been to the South frequently, buying slaves. He'd spread rumors all around that we are lacking people here in Ferde Wilderness. He'd probably spread the news of the anti-magic soil discovery as well, giving the impression that we are wealthy. These refugees probably thought they'd be safe here, that's why most of them sneaked through the borders of the kingdom by the Black River and reached here eventually."

Link's estate was indeed short of people, so in Gildern's eyes, their arrival had been a good thing.

While Link had the same opinion as well, as a liege lord, there were many more things for him to consider. He had to view it from the perspective of his estate's development as well. If anything went wrong at this point, it would send a cascade of negative effects into motion and ultimately influence his estate's future.

Link gazed around at the refugees on both sides of the road and fell into silent contemplation.

These refugees all knew that Link was the Magician lord of the land. They all stood humbly before him with their heads bowed down. When Link's gaze fell upon them, they all became restless, as if awaiting a verdict that would decide their fate.

The children all looked malnourished and weak. Their little faces were dirty, and the clothes they wore were nothing more than tattered rags. They held tightly to their parents' clothes with wonder and fear in their eyes. They seemed curious and wanted to get a closer look at Link, and yet they were afraid of the strange man, so they quickly darted their eyes away from Link. They were just as fearful as little rabbits.

Seeing that Link had not spoken, even Gildern had begun to feel nervous now. Although he'd become Link's follower not too long ago, at that time, Link's reputation had risen higher and higher, and his power kept expanding at a shocking rate. Even his aura was so terrifying now that it could inspire anyone with fear.

Suddenly, there was a change in Link.

He lifted his finger and pointed at a young man not too far away from him.

"Catch him and bring him here!" he ordered two soldiers beside him.

"My lord, what—" Gildern muttered in bewilderment.

Link interrupted Gildern's sentence with a wave of his hand and motioned to the soldiers to obey his orders immediately.

Right now, the mercenary troop had transformed into the armed guards of the Ferde Wilderness. Link was the lord of the Ferde Wilderness and a powerful Master Magician, so he wielded absolute power over the soldiers in the troop. The two soldiers then rushed towards the young man with haste.

The young man panicked and was about to turn around and run away. But that was foolish of him, of course, since there was another soldier merely a few feet away from him who instantly kicked his leg and made him fall splat to the ground.

The two strong soldiers then rushed over and seized him and took him to Link. They made the young man kneel on the ground in front of him.

The atmosphere was extremely tense, and all the refugees went silent. Some babies seemed to sense the fear in the air and opened their little mouths to cry. But before they made a sound, their cries were muffled by their mothers who held them closer to their chests.

Link said nothing to explain himself. He took out his wand and used the Magician's Hand to rip open the front part of the young man's clothes, exposing his bare chest. The young man was well-built and looked very strong, completely different from what a starving refugee would look like. Then, over his heart, there was a tattoo of a dark green dagger with seven drops of blood dripping from it.

The young man's face changed suddenly. His whole body tensed up, and there was a

faint Battle Aura emanating from his body. No one knew where he got the dagger that suddenly appeared in his hand, and he then sprung up abruptly and lunged forward to stab the dagger at Link!

It all happened so quickly and unexpectedly that all everyone could do was gasp in horror. Gildern's eyes bulged out, and he tried to pull out his sword to rush up and block the dagger, but he was an archer, so his speed couldn't compare to that of an Assassin.

Just then, a faint white light appeared around Link's body. It was the Level-4 Edelweiss. A moment later there was a blur in the air in front of Link's body where the Vector Resistant Force Field appeared.

Bam!

The Assassin lost his balance when he lunged forward and was blocked by Link's shield. He was knocked back a few steps before a whoosh was heard when a terrifying giant Flaming Hand appeared which grabbed the Assassin and held him in its palm. Horrible screams then escaped the lips of the Assassin which rang through the whole area.

A second later, Link stretched out the giant hand which made the Assassin fall slumping to the ground. He wasn't dead yet, and the burns on his body weren't so serious, but his Battle Aura was completely burnt out.

He fell to the ground panting and stared at Link with eyes that were full of terror.

The refugees around Link watched the scene silently. Many of them gulped in fear. They now gazed at Link as if he were the most fearsome person they'd ever met. Some children even burst into tears. The scene that displayed the Magician lord's power had been seared into their memories, and in that instant, they knew that Link was a man who was "invincible" and who possessed terrifying "godly powers."

That's exactly the kind of effect that Link had expected. He cast a voice amplifier spell on himself and took a few steps towards the Assassin.

"Are you a spy sent by the Syndicate?" Link asked with a voice loud enough that everyone could hear.

The young man's face was pale, but he remained silent, which meant that the

allegation was true.

The refugees then went into an uproar. It's no wonder why the lord would suddenly launch those terrifying attacks since the young man turned out to be one of those infamous Syndicate thieves. With this revelation, the fear in their hearts was greatly reduced.

Link observed the reactions of the refugees. He found it satisfactory. He had no intention of showing his terrifying power just to intimidate these people at all.

"Take him away and hang him at the north gate!" ordered Link at the soldiers beside him.

The soldiers obeyed his orders immediately. Not long afterwards they could hear a brief scream from the northern gate of Scorched Ridge. The Syndicate's spy was dead.

Throughout the process, all of Scorched Ridge was silent.

Link's actions had left a deep impression on the refugees' minds. In their eyes, this Magician lord had godly eyesight and was capable of fearsome magic powers. He was also very decisive and would have his orders carried out as soon as they were given. Thus, right now the refugees were as docile as a flock of sheep before Link. They felt that they were completely at his mercy.

When Link sensed their reactions, he knew that he'd achieved what he expected to do. His face suddenly turned warm and kindly. He had many reasons for doing what he just did. In fact, killing that spy from the Syndicate was merely his secondary goal.

These refugees had arrived too early in his estate's development stage. They hadn't seen true order being set up, and the construction in the area was also still in operation. In other words, with the large influx of refugees into his estate, there was a chance that the area might become too chaotic.

Once this happened, it would be difficult to solve in a short span of time. It could only be gradually improved over time. Therefore, the wisest thing to do now was to establish the absolute power of the lord in order to avoid the conditions in his territory to descend into chaos later.

That was why Link acted the way he did the moment he arrived. He used the most impressive spells to remind everyone that he was the lord of this land and that he

would make sure that order was installed in this area.

After the severe act, now it was time to show the people his kinder and gentler side.

Having dealt with the Syndicate spy, Link walked to a high mound where everyone could see him and began his address.

"I, Baron Link Morani, the lord of the Ferde Wilderness, welcome you to stay in my territory. Here, as long as you obey my rules, you will lead good lives as free people."

The refugees heaved a sigh of relief in droves the moment they heard Link's speech. Their tightened heartstrings began to loosen, and they calmed down and began to whisper among themselves.

"The lord is such a young man," whispered one of them.

"The rumors are true," said another, "his magic really is powerful!"

"He's not just fearsome and majestic, he's also very wise!" commented one of the refugees. "Did you see how he recognized the thief from the Syndicate with just a glance?"

Link knew that he'd done well after hearing these remarks. Now that his work here was done, he decided that it was time to leave.

"Summon all officials for a meeting," said Link to Gildern. "I have some important things to arrange with all of you."

# Chapter 220

## Such Measly Power Is Easy to Dispel

Gildern was pretty smart and could vaguely understand Link's motive. He admired how Link managed to make this decision. He could feel that they were no longer the small mercenary troop they were in the past. They were now in charge of developing a territory with great prospects. Their decisions might determine the fate of thousands of people. This meant that they had to handle everything that happened in the territory more cautiously as compared to before.

Recollecting Link's handling of the situation, he felt extremely inspired. He hence ran to execute it immediately.

After Link reached the parliament hall on the second floor, the core members Jacker, Lucy, Gildern, Carrido, and Celine arrived within 15 minutes.

Amongst the five of them, four had followed Link very early in his journey. Celine was the only one that joined recently. Although she did not show any capabilities in terms of combat power, she seemed to be extremely smart and was on good terms with Lucy. Celine would often give Lucy inspiring advice and solved many problems regarding the territory. She had proved herself to be a capable person.

"Please take a seat."

Link nodded to the five of them to acknowledge their presence. When he saw Celine, he felt a warm fuzzy feeling in his heart and smiled.

Link immediately went straight to the point and said, "I will have to leave the territory for a while. Before I leave, there are some things that I have to arrange."

Everyone listened carefully.

"Firstly, I have already seen the refugees. Most of them are ordinary people. However, to be able to get past the Black River and travel all the way here is a testament to their adventurous spirit and courage. If we manage them well, they will definitely prove themselves to be excellent citizens."

Link had no reason not to take these refugees in.

Upon hearing this, Lucy said, "I'm afraid we might encounter some problems with the Kingdom of Delonga. They are essentially still citizens of that kingdom. If they request that we hand them over, we have no reason to refuse."

This was truly an issue. Although the Ferde Wilderness could simply give an outright rejection, they would still have to trade with the Delonga Kingdom in the future. It was not cost-effective to make that move. The mercenary band had grown over this period. They all now understood the dangers without anyone specifically voicing them out. However, their experience of dealing with these issues was still limited. Jacker, Gildern, and Carrido all frowned at the thought.

Celine then interrupted, "I have an idea."

Link smiled as he said, "Please continue."

Celine said, "Please think. The Kingdom of Delonga has suffered a defeat in the war. They might even have to pay reparations to the South Moon Kingdom in the future and will definitely be in financial crisis. If the Kingdom of Delonga truly wants to claim their citizens back, we can simply purchase them using gold coins. They should be very happy with this trade."

The relationship between two nations boiled down simply to interests. As long as their interests aligned, anything was possible.

The Ferde Wilderness would never run out of gold coins after all.

Lucy thought for a moment and commended, "That is a good idea. There is no problem then."

Link also nodded. He then continued, "The Syndicate in the North is running rampant trying to spread their sinister doctrines. They will probably try to infiltrate our territory. Jacker, please make sure that the Syndicate does not extend its reach into our territory."

"I understand!" Jacker's voice was low and reassuring. As the military commander of the territory, he had been practicing even harder to meet that expectation. He had already reached Level-4 and was about to breakthrough to Level-5, becoming the strongest Warrior in the entire territory. This was already a significant strength.



However, as the one holding the highest military power in the entire territory, it was still lacking.

The limitations of Jacker's power lay in the Level-3 Secret Battle Aura Link taught him. It was merely a low-level Battle Aura skill, and Level-5 was probably the maximum anyone could go practicing that skill. It was preposterous to even think about reaching greater heights.

Previously, Link was also out of options. He could only find the Level-3 Secret Battle Aura in the game system. However, he now had seven Epic Battle Aura scrolls and many other ordinary ones with him. It was time to bring them out.

"That is all for the refugees' case. Now let's move on to the next issue."

As Link spoke, he brought out a scroll and gave it to Jacker. "Open it."

Jacker was slightly puzzled by Link's actions. After browsing through the scroll briefly, his eyes widened and immediately stood up, "My lord, this... this is way too valuable for me!"

Jacker had a natural affinity for the earth elements. Link hence gave him a scroll named the Ares Tactic, an earth elemental Epic Battle Aura stance that focused on defensive techniques. Jacker had already learned how to read. Although he could not understand the technique at a glance, he knew that it was a terribly strong Battle Aura the moment he saw the named Ares Tactic. He was extremely honored to be entrusted with such a piece of treasure.

Link merely smiled before giving Lucy a wind elemental Emperor Duel Battle Aura scroll and Gildern, a fire elemental Overlord Tactics Battle Aura scroll.

"This is only meant for the three of you. No spreading of the scroll without my permission," Link commanded.

"Yes, my lord!" The three of them answered immediately. A single scroll would be able to be passed off as a treasured heirloom in a strong, noble family. To think that Link could produce three of them at once. However, Link was still not done. He then took out over ten more ordinary Battle Aura scrolls and handed them to Gildern and Jacker.

"There will be more people coming to the territory in the future. We will have to increase the scale of our army and scouts inevitably. If you see any powerful and

competent people, you can reward them with these Battle Aura scrolls. Those with exceptional talents can then be temporarily considered to read these Epic Battle Aura scrolls. You can pass the name list to me for the final deliberation."

Jacker was the captain of the army while Gildern was the captain of the scouts. Their eyes flashed with excitement upon hearing those words. With these Battle Aura techniques as a foundation, both of them believed that the strength of their army would increase exponentially.

They then started discussing some other superfluous things which took the rest of the day. The meeting ended in the evening.

Link had not gotten any rest in a long time. After dinner, he was prepared to have a good night's rest and set off to the North the next day. The moment he lay on his bed, he heard knocking on his door. The sound was light, almost as if they did not want to disturb anyone else. From the magic fluctuations, Link could tell that the person behind that door was Celine. He opened the door with his Magician's Hand without any hesitation.

Celine then quickly entered the room and closed the door behind her. Seeing Link lying in bed in just his pajamas, she felt slightly embarrassed. She got these thoughts out of her head before asking, "Are you seriously going to the North?"

Link was speechless. He felt that King Leon was not doing a good job keeping his mission a secret. How else would everyone around him know what he was going to do?

"Who did you hear this from? That's not true..." Link denied.

"I gave Dorias a roasted lamb leg, and he told me everything," Celine silenced Link in just one sentence.

"What a gluttonous overweight cat." Link smiled bitterly. He was, however, certain that Dorias only gave in because the other party was Celine. If it had been anyone else, he would have stayed silent even if they had brought him 100 roasted cows.

Celine said, "Let me accompany you."

Link immediately shook his head. "No, that is a terrible idea. You cannot be exposed, especially in the North. If that happens, the Norton Kingdom army and the Dark Elves

will both become your enemies."

Celine rebutted, "But have you ever thought what would happen if I stayed here? My father might send ferocious demons to your territory and cause a disaster."

Link fell silent immediately and frowned. This was indeed a problem that he had neglected. Although sending a large army of demons to Firuman required a huge amount of resources, Celine had a special type of bloodline which till this date, no one knew the value of. What if it was indeed so valuable that Nozama would risk anything to get his hands on it?

Seeing Link's reaction, Celine grabbed his hand and pleaded, "Don't worry bout me. I will just follow you around and hide in the shadows. I'll only appear if you are in danger. What do you think?"

Link still did not reply. Although having Celine with him always put him at ease and allowed him to reach his maximum potential, this mission was way too dangerous. However, if he were not at Celine's side, she would similarly be in danger from her father's pursuit.

As he was at his wit's end, a voice rang in his mind, "What a strange little girl."

This voice came from the sword spirit who claimed that he was too lazy to talk to Link and would enter a state of slumber. Link naturally was not petty enough to care about such things. The moment he heard this, he then remembered Vance's evaluation of Celine's blood. He then asked in excitement, "What do you mean?"

"She reminds me of a man named the Soul Dominator. She has a very similar aura and might be a descendant of that powerful man... I cannot be sure unless I taste her blood."

Link was also very curious about the mystery of Celine's blood. He then thought of an idea and took over the Storm Lord's sword he had placed on his bedside, asking, "Celine, what do you think of this sword?"

Celine thought Link was hesitating as he fell silent after her proposition. She was taken aback by the sudden change of topic. Nonetheless, she still took the sword over and brandished it slightly before handing it back to Link, "Not too bad. Don't try to change the topic; you have not agreed to take me with you."

Link smiled awkwardly and continued, "This sword is not only beautiful, but also very sharp. Look at its blade."

"How is that possible, this blade is obviously blunt." Celine's attention was once again brought to the sword by Link. She took the Storm Lord's sword over and ran her fingers gently over the blade. It was rounded and definitely blunt. To be honest, she had been wondering why Link carried it around with him everywhere he went.

Suddenly, she felt a sharp pain in her fingers and pulled her hand back. She then looked at the supposedly blunt blade and saw a drop of her blood on it.

"That is odd; it is indeed sharp." Celine was now completely absorbed by the sword. She observed it with interest and stopped pressing Link on the matter about him going to the North.

In this period, Link patiently waited for an answer.

Half a minute later, the sword spirit said, "I was right. She is a descendant of that man, a direct descendant at that. There can be no other reason how her bloodline could be this strong."

Link's curiosity was piqued, "What kind of person is the Soul Dominator exactly?"

"He belonged to neither the light or the dark side. Amongst the Legendary professionals, he had the deepest understanding of the principles of the soul. He could even create a soul directly and also destroy them with ease. My master and the Soul Dominator were good friends. In fact, I owe it to him that I can be speaking to you right now... I kind of owe him a favor."

The sword spirit spoke with nostalgia. He then fell silent before continuing, "This young girl also has dark energy mixed into her blood. This is terrible, simply a blasphemy against the Soul Dominator. I won't allow this to happen; I am going to dispel it to return the favor."

Can you do it? You won't injure her right? Link was not convinced.

"Hmph! You ignorant mortal!"

As soon as he spoke, the Storm Lord's sword in Celine's hand started glowing in a white light. The light was dim and entered Celine's body through her arms. Following

which, Celine fainted immediately.

Link hurriedly went over and laid her on the bed.

Furthermore, after Celine fainted, the Storm Lord's sword levitated into the air and pierced right through Celine's heart with a swoosh. Streaks of lightning then enveloped the sword and continuously poured into Celine's heart.

Link looked at the entire scene with horror. If not for the fact that Celine was still breathing and no visible wounds or even blood could be seen, he would have absolutely destroyed the sword.

In order to prevent any magic fluctuations from leaking, Link cast a concealing barrier spell over the wooden house. The situation in the wooden house then became more intense than ever.

Dark energy poured out constantly from Celine's heart. However, the moment it appeared, it would be instantly dispelled by the streaks of light around the sword. At first, the dark energy was extremely concentrated and strong, but as time passed, this energy grew weaker until the last trace of dark energy disappeared.

At that moment, the Storm Lord's sword removed itself from Celine's chest. Link ran over and was surprised to see no visible signs of damage, not even on her clothes. It was as though the Storm Lord's attack was a phantom blow that passed through matter.

A weak voice then rang in Link's mind, "The dark energy is extremely strong. I am certain that it is from some strong demon. If this young girl had already attained Legendary status, there would have been no hope. However, it was still within my power to dispel the dark energy within her as of now. I have dispelled most of the dark energy and have also sealed the remaining. Now, no one can ever trace her from her bloodline.

"What about her powers?" Link asked.

"Power? You mean that measly bit of power? I naturally dispelled it together with the dark energy. But this is only temporary. Without the oppression of the dark energy, the power she inherited from the Soul Dominator will start to awaken."

Link then stared at Celine and realized that she had begun to undergo physical

changes. Her hair color had turned from pure black to a deep purple while her skin had become crystal clear with a white glow. The faint evil presence emanating from her previously had also completely disappeared.

Link then carefully opened Celine's eyelids and realized that her irises had also turned a deep purple. Even Celine's trademark the little demon fangs under her lips had also disappeared.

Celine started breathing faster, and before long, she was awake.

"What happened?" Celine sat up with her hand on her forehead as she gasped. She was still slightly confused at first, but upon realizing that she was lying on Link's bed, her cheeks immediately flushed, and she got up in a hurry.

"You passed out and then..."

"Do not mention anything about me!" The sword reminded.

"And I sealed the dark energy in your body. You are now an ordinary human." Link thought of an excuse on the spot.

Celine could feel the changes in her body as well. The surging dark energy within her had completely disappeared. She had mixed feelings at the beginning, happy that she had finally gotten rid of her detestable dark past, but also disappointed that the power she worked so hard to build up was now gone.

Link comforted, "Without the bloodline of the dark energy, the demons will not be able to find you. This means that you are now safe in the territory. As for the North, you don't have to go now, do you?"

"You... Oh, how infuriating!" Celine did not know how to react and stamped her feet all the way out of the room.

"I'll be going back!"

Link did not ask her to stay and watched as she disappeared into the hallway. He then thought for a moment and was still worried about leaving Celine alone in the territory. He then went to look for Dorias.

"What, you are not letting me go to the North? I'd be happy not to!" the tiger exclaimed.

"Protect Celine? Oh, rest assured that no harm will come to her!"

Link then went back to rest feeling satisfied.

The next morning, Link bade farewell to everyone in the territory and summoned the Wind Fenrir in front of the on looking crowd before riding his way to the North. This suave action caused the new immigrants and refugees to look on with admiration and respect.

# Chapter 221

## The Ghouls of the Black Forest

On the Icy Peak of the Black Forest in the northern part of Norton Kingdom.

More than four months ago, the Norton Kingdom's army thwarted the first attack from the Dark Elves at Icy Peak. From then on, they charged straight forward through the forest and into the Pralync Kingdom.

As they moved forward, Icy Peak also changed from being a battlefield to the rear camp of the Norton Kingdom's army. Now after months of construction with almost unlimited funding, it had become a large-scale fortress.

Today, the weather was as terrible as usual with the dark clouds in the sky and the biting wind whistling through the air. The low temperatures here could easily freeze people's ears off their heads. Nonetheless, the guards of the fortress dared not take their duties lightly even in such weather. A team of soldiers patrolled the outer walls of the fortress. The soldiers rubbed their hands and stomped their feet to keep warm, but their eyes remained sharp and vigilant as they guarded the northern wall of the fortress.

The Black Forest was gloomy and biting cold. When the wind blew through the forest trees, it would make an eerie howling sound. Moreover, the forest seemed to be packed with crows which would appear suddenly and caw loudly.

It was as if the Black Forest was haunted!

Just then, the soldiers heard the clip-clop sound of horses approaching the fortress. The guard captain immediately shouted an order, "Everyone, on guard!"

The soldiers gripped their weapons tightly. The archers nocked their arrows, while the other soldiers locked their eyes on the direction where the horse was approaching. If they noticed anything wrong at all, they would not hesitate to attack instantly.

The horse approached closer and closer, and after about half a minute, a group of knights emerged from the dense forest. There were a total of 13 knights, and all their



armor had been stained red with blood. The knight in front was clad in dark green armor, and he was carrying a bleeding and dying Magician on his saddle.

"I'm Falcon, Royal Knight of the Norton Kingdom! Open the gate!" shouted the knight who was carrying the Magician.

Falcon, a Royal Knight of the kingdom, was a Level-6 Warrior and the captain of the vanguard. His weapon was the Holy Cross sword. Once Battle Aura flowed into this sword, it would light up in a holy, silver light that was unique to the sword.

The soldiers looked at the sword and waited for another five or six seconds. After determining that Falcon was not pursued by any enemies behind him, they slowly opened the gate of the fortress and let him in.

The knights sped through the fortress gate before it closed up again immediately as all of them had entered. Not a single second was wasted.

Once they were all inside, Falcon carried the dying Magician down from the saddle of his horse and gave him to the knight beside him.

"Quick," he ordered, "take Artor to the priest!"

The knight then held the young Magician and ran towards a small chapel of the fortress. The Magician, Artor was slashed in the neck, but fortunately, none of his vital veins were cut, so he was still alive.

Falcon continued to gallop more than 150 feet into the fortress square before dismounting. He gave the horse to a soldier nearby while he himself rushed into the command hall.

Inside the hall, there were loud voices from different figures of various positions. Some were generals and officers, while others were clerks and soldiers. They were all discussing their strategic plans.

Falcon walked to the entrance and wiped the blood traces that had been frozen to ice off his face.

"My lord," he loudly said, "the vanguard camp has been attacked!"

All of a sudden, the hall fell silent. Everyone's eyes turned to Falcon. Duke Abel, who

sat at the head of the long table, turned to Falcon with an expressionless face.

"What did you say?" he asked. "Repeat yourself!"

Falcon rushed into the hall with signs of panic still in his eyes.

"Those ghouls blinded our guards early this morning, my lord," he reported. "Then the Black Tooth Legion of the Dark Elf army suddenly launched an attack on our camp. There were 5000 soldiers in the vanguard... but only 13 escaped."

The ghouls were a terrifying group of Dark Elves that suddenly appeared on the battlefields since the war started. Their speed was as fast as the wind, they were almost invisible, and their strength was inexhaustible. Ordinary swords and weapons could never kill them, even when their vital points were struck down. In short, these ghouls were close to supernatural!

Only 13 soldiers in the vanguard camp escaped out of 5000. In other words, the entire camp was annihilated.

Duke Abel's face turned hard and cold.

"What about Karnose?" he asked Falcon. "Wasn't he in the vanguard camp? Where is he?"

The Black Forest was where most of the ghouls lay; that was the area around the vanguard camp. To help combat them, the Dawn Swordsman was sent there. As the only Level-8 Warrior in the kingdom, he was deemed as the best person who could eliminate the threat of these ghouls. But no matter how powerful the Warrior was, in the end, he was just one person, while the total number of ghouls wasn't clear. So far, according to reports, there were more than a hundred of them now. The presence of the Dawn Swordsman could do nothing but temporarily suppress the wild attacks of the ghouls.

Falcon's eyes turned red as he thought of Karnose.

"I don't know, my lord," he said. "To protect us and make sure that we escaped from the camp, Lord Karnose decided to remain there and fight. As for what happened to him now, I... I don't know."

It had gone so quiet at this point that a pin dropping on the floor would echo

throughout the hall.

The people here had been through wars before, so they knew its harsh brutality well. They knew that even if Karnose was an invincible Warrior when faced with an army, the most he could do was kill a hundred of the soldiers. He still wouldn't be able to escape certain death himself.

In other words, the top Warrior of Norton Kingdom had now almost certainly died in battle.

Silence lingered in the hall. No one made a sound for three minutes. Then, Duke Abel stood up and took a deep breath then looked around at all the generals in the hall.

"It's time to shrink the line of defense!" he said coldly.

At present, there were 190,000 soldiers in the North divided into ten regiments. These regiments were centered in Icy Peak which then formed a defense line facing the north of Black Forest. The vanguard camp, on the other hand, was kept 50 miles further north of the fortress.

Once the vanguard camp was attacked, there was now only one legion left to protect the fortress. The situation had become a little too dangerous. If the defeat had come from a normal battle, the Norton Kingdom army would certainly be able to counterattack from the flanking sides of the battlefield and teach the Dark Elves a harsh lesson. But now that these ghouls came into the picture, things had gotten a lot trickier.

These ghouls hid in the Black Forest and were almost untraceable. The scouts from the MI3 weren't able to fight against them, and all that encountered the ghouls had died with very little exceptions.

So far, the number of scouts in the forest kept dwindling, and the army received less and less information. By now, the links between various regiments had almost been cut off by these ghouls which made fighting a war that much more difficult.

In this case, the safest strategy was to retreat the line of defense. Duke Abel still had some doubts about the decision, but now that the best Warrior in the army had fallen and the entire vanguard camp was annihilated, he had to make up his mind.

The generals had nothing to say, either. Everyone knew that at this point it was

basically impossible to fight on. They'd even begun to draw up orders to get ready to withdraw.

Duke Abel then turned to a man wearing gray leather armor beside him.

"Karnose might still be alive," he said, "I want you to send out a search party and find news of Karnose."

That man was Dilo. He was the commander of the scout team of the MI3. He was responsible for collecting information on the battlefield. A month earlier, he did an excellent job and had almost squeezed the life out of the Dark Elf army. But ever since the ghouls appeared, the tables were turned completely.

Dilo frowned when he heard Duke Abel's order.

"My lord," he said with a lowered voice, "the Black Forest is infested with the ghouls. If we send more people out into the forest, there would only be more people dead."

He did not say this out of cowardice. He'd seen what happened in the last half month how with every team of scouts he sent out into the Black Forest only about 10% survived and came back alive. At this point, all the news the king and the army received was in exchange for the scouts' lives.

Naturally, as the leader of these scouts, he was sad to see his elite members sacrificed one-by-one.

But Duke Abel got furious as he listened to Dilo's reply.

"Stop your excuses!" he spat. "This is a military order! Find him at all costs!" He was well aware of the dangers in the Black Forest. Still, Karnose wasn't just a Level-8 Warrior—he was the source of morale for the entire army.

If even the Dawn Swordsman had fallen, how would the rest of the army find any courage to continue to stay in the North? How would they fight on in this war?

"As you wish, my lord," said Dilo. He had no other choices. Then, he rushed out of the hall and began to carry out the orders.

To everyone's surprise, Dilo returned again to the hall after ten minutes.

"What's the matter?" Duke Abel asked impatiently.

"My lord," said Dilo in a hushed voice as he walked up to the duke. "The princess insisted that she wants to join the search party. I came to ask you for your advice."

"..."

The Iron Duke's jaw dropped for a few moments. He wanted to tell Dilo to refuse his daughter's request, but just as he was about to utter the words, he discovered that everyone in the hall was watching him. They must've heard of what happened now.

He hesitated for a while, but finally, Duke Abel gave Dilo his decision.

"Let her go," he said with a trembling voice. "Don't treat her any differently from other members of the team. The search and rescue of Karnose is the most important thing."

His daughter, Annie, was now only a Level-4 Assassin. In the past, this level would be considered powerful. But now with the ghouls around, sending someone of her level out into the forest would practically be a death sentence for her. Yet now, he could do nothing to stop it; it was the price he had to pay for being the commander of the army.

Duke Abel then stood up and announced, "I must go get some rest."

He turned away from the command hall as all eyes watched him leave silently. The Iron Duke seemed to have aged ten years in the last few minutes. Even his walking gait had gotten weak now.

"Dilo," the duke's adjutant whispered, "you must not let anything happen to the princess."

"I will do what I can," said Dilo with a thin smile. In truth, it was too late for him to do anything now.

...

The news that the vanguard camp was attacked and that the fate of the Dawn Swordsman was unknown couldn't be kept a secret for long. When the search party left the Icy Peak, all tens of thousands of people in the fortress had heard of the news by then.

For a time, the air in the fortress was extremely tense. Although the main force of the army had not been lost, their morale suffered a deep plunge. At that moment, the Black Forest had become less of a battlefield, but more of a deep abyss that sucked lives into its deep and dark underbelly.

No more than half an hour after the search party left, a figure clad in a loose black cloak walked out from the forest near the fortress. It was Link.

He'd just arrived, so he knew nothing about the current situation.

He stared at the strong and magnificent fortress in front of him and couldn't help but admire it.

"They've built such a large fortress in less than six months' time," he exclaimed. "What a feat!"

He then quickened his pace and approached the fortress gate.

# Chapter 222

## To Think It Would Be Someone as Prominent as You

### Ice Peak Military Fortress

In order to keep his mission a secret, Link stood in front of the fortress door clad in a low-level magic robe. He then shouted at the guards on the outer wall. "I am Mirose, a Magician from the East Cove Higher Magic Academy, here to join the army."

"Prove your identity!" the captain of the outer guards replied. He did not receive any news that a Magician from the academy would be arriving at the fortress today. If it were an ordinary Warrior, he would not even bother entertaining him. He might even order for him to be killed if he got too close. However, the other party now was a Magician; he had to be cautious.

Proving my identity? Link was slightly stunned at this request and thought for a moment before replying, "I am friends with a disciple of Dean Anthony named Marco. If you do not believe me, you can testify with him."

Although his mission was a secret, King Leon had already arranged everything beforehand. The alias Mirose was also one that they decided on together so as to ensure consistency.

The guard captain hesitated. He knew Marco personally and, in the past, such an action would be enough for him to let his guard down. However, the situation now was extremely tense. How would he know if this person was not a Dark Elf spy?

He then said, "Please wait while I get Marco here."

He then immediately turned around and walked towards the Mage Tower in the fortress. Link naturally could only wait outside the castle wall.

Ten minutes later, Magician Marco appeared on the castle wall with a perplexed look on his face.

Mirose? Who is that?

He received news two days ago that the academy would be sending a young Magician named Mirose over to the fortress. This news was exceptionally strange. He could not understand why the academy would send merely one Magician over. It would be fine if that Magician were strong and famous. However, Mirose... Could it be a name of a Magician's Apprentice?

From the castle wall, Marco looked down and saw a young man standing right outside the castle wall, looking at him with an inviting smile on his face.

Marco could recognize this person just from a glance—black hair and black eyes with a youthful demeanor. There was only one person in the entire academy who looked like that—the new Master Magician Link Morani!

He was, after all, a Level-4 Magician and could maintain his composure. Although he was excited and surprised at Link's arrival, he did not show any of those emotional fluctuations on his face and said, "He is someone from the academy. Let him in."

With his testimony, the guard captain was naturally relieved and ordered the guards beside him, "Open the gate."

The rattling sounds of gears could be heard as the drawbridge was lowered slowly to pave the way for Link's entrance. Before Link could enter the fortress, Magician Marco had already come out to welcome him.

After reaching Link's side, he looked around to make sure no one was looking before whispering in excitement, "Sir, I have been informed that a combat Magician would arrive. To think that it would be someone as prominent as you!"

Link had already made his name known throughout the Magician world reaching the status of a master at a tender age of 18 years old. His accomplishment of defeating a Level-8 demon with a Level-9 spell had also proved his overwhelming strength, just shy of reaching the Legendary status.

Under his dazzling brilliance, Wavier of the South, Eliard who managed to become a level-3 Magician in half a year, and other Magicians who call themselves genius all dimmed in comparison.

Link smiled meekly and corrected, "I am not a master. I am Mirose, a Level-2 Magician.



Have you forgotten?"

"Oh, yes, yes. It is Mirose." Marco nodded.

Link headed into the fortress while Magician Marco followed hastily behind like a follower.

"Where is the Dawn Swordsman? Bring me to him." Link did not waste a single moment. He knew that the longer he stayed in the fortress, the likelihood of his identity being exposed would increase.

He was the nemesis of the Dark Elves, the criminal who killed the Constellation Assassin of the Norigan Familia. If the Dark Elves had noticed his arrival in the Dark Forest, they would definitely pursue him with all their might.

However, this sentence caused a frown to appear on Marco's face, his melancholy obvious.

Link suddenly got a bad premonition and said, "What happened?"

Marco whispered, "The pioneer group that the army sent out had been breached and annihilated by the Dark Elves. Kanorse had chosen to be the defensive force for that mission and is nowhere to be found. The Duke had sent out a rescue team for this purpose alone. Even Princess Annie went along this time around."

Link as startled at the news and paused, "When did this happen?"

"Just an hour before you arrived. The rescue team was just dispatched. However, the Dark Forest is infested with ghouls; I'm afraid this mission will also..." Marco did not complete his sentence, but his meaning was clear.

Link captured a single word in his entire speech and asked, "Ghouls? You mean the things that recently appeared in the Dark Forest?"

An expression of fear immediately appeared on Marco's face. "Yes, that's them! They are way too strong! The entire army is in a state of despair. The ghouls have nearly taken over the entire Dark Forest!"

Upon hearing those words, Link fell silent and stopped moving forward. He then heard the rattling sound of gears coming from behind him. The guards were retracting the

drawbridge.

"It seems like I need to take action now. Marco, tell them to lower the drawbridge. I am setting off now." Link walked towards the fortress gate.

"Link... I mean, Mirose... alone?" Marco followed behind Link hastily as he signaled for the guards to lower the drawbridge.

"No, I will catch up with the rescue team and move together with them. The Duke made the right decision. The Dawn Swordsman's current state cannot be ambiguous! In fact, he must live!"

He needed the strength of the Dawn Swordsman to deal with the enhanced demonized Dark Elves called ghouls.

In ten years, the Dawn Swordsman would still be the strongest Warrior in the World of Firuman. By that time, he would have reached the highest Legendary level and be conferred the title of a Divine Swordsman. Eliard and he would be collectively called the two saints of the human race, serving as the two psychological pillars in the war.

These were sufficient reasons for Link to go out of his way to rescue Kanorse.

At this moment, the drawbridge had already been lowered. Link then cast a Cheetah's Agility onto himself and rushed out of the gate. He then cast a Level-0 levitation spell which increased his speed drastically to 150 feet per step. He then floated with ease down the slope of the Ice Peak, hastily making his way into the Dark Forest.

Before long, he reached the boundaries of the Dark Forest and seemed determined to enter the dangerous foothold of the Dark Elves.

A troop of guards looked at him from the castle walls with a stunned expression on their faces.

"That Magician is entering the Dark Forest alone? Is he insane?"

"Is he trying to commit suicide?"

"Did anyone of you realize that his spellcasting speed is extremely fast?"

"So what if he is fast? He is alone!"

The captain of the guards had already made his way down the castle walls and walked towards Marco. He then asked curiously, "Sir, what is going on with this Mirose guy?"

He had only just arrived but left immediately for the Dark Forest. What is going on?

Marco then stared as Link's figure disappeared into the shadows of the Dark Forest. He then shook his head, "Warrior, this is not something you should know."

If the Dawn Swordsman Kanorse was the pillar of support to all Warriors in the Norton Kingdom, then Link, the Magician who single-handedly defeated the great demon Tarviss would be a Legendary figure revered by all combat Magicians.

If he could not save Kanorse from this predicament, then possibly no one could.

...

## The Dark Forest

Thirty-Five Elite Scouts clad in black leather armor rushed towards the enemy's base under their disguise and concealment. They were heading towards the vanguard camp to rendezvous with the surviving troops before infiltrating the enemy's base together to save the Dawn Swordsman.

The Scouts' eyes shone with a bladed resolve, though not a shred of hope could be found in those eyes. From the moment they entered the Dark Forest, they were prepared to give up their lives.

Caw! Caw! Caw!

A crow flew across them, seemingly mocking this group of human scouts who was overestimating their abilities.

The sound of their feet sinking into the thick layer of snow on the ground accentuated the sinister atmosphere of the Dark Forest. Among the scouts who were traveling in a scattered formation, four of them were gathered together. In the middle of this group was Annie Abel, the only daughter of the Iron Duke. She was closely protected by three guards surrounding her, ready to take any lethal blows for the princess the moment danger struck.

Although Annie did not want this to happen, this was her father's arrangement. She

could only accept disdainfully.

All of her subordinates had already lost their lives in this northern war of the Dark Forest. The previous time when they were met with danger, almost all of the comrades delved into a frenzy trying to protect her with their own lives, creating opportunities for her to escape.

At that moment, she saw Aldivin's head getting completely severed by a ghoul. The blood from his neck spurted nearly three feet into the air as his eyes from the severed head still shone with camaraderie and rage. She also saw Molly's petite body being torn in two by the ferocious ghouls. Despite the brutal treatment she was subjected to, she still held on tightly to the ghoul's leg, even so after she had lost consciousness. She had seen way too many sacrifices. Yet, she was still alive.

She then looked at the scouts surrounding her. She saw three pairs of eyes bursting with youth and hope for a better tomorrow. They were just like Aldivin and Molly, people who were supposed to be enjoying the vibrancy of their youth.

Annie could not help but feel a sharp ache in her heart upon seeing those faces. The scene from that fateful night was still etched deeply in her mind. Her heart convulsed with despair, seemingly dripping blood with every beat.

She hated that she was of noble blood. If not, she would have fought to her death with the ghouls as well. That would probably be better than living while shouldering the sacrifices she had witnessed and endless pain she was going through.

Suddenly, the captain of the scouts raised his hand to signal for them to stop. The scouts then immediately froze in their tracks before finding cover to hide.

Annie then hid behind a fallen tree.

The forest had become exceptionally quiet. The chirping of the birds and screeching of the insects had instantly disappeared, leaving only the sound of the howling wind. It was as though all life in the Dark Forest had momentarily vanished into thin air. Annie then stole a glance at the tree she was hiding behind. She saw a small lizard who seemed to be moving in an eccentric manner. It quickly hid inside the fallen tree, as though it was afraid of something. It was not just the lizard. The ants, caterpillars, spiders and all other small insects were fleeing the area in fear.

Annie had once witnessed such a scene. She knew what was happening.

Her heart thumped violently and held her dagger tightly in her hands. Although it was still not sufficient to kill a ghoul, her dagger smeared with holy water would pose a threat to the ghouls.

The atmosphere had instantly become oppressive. Annie saw that all of the scouts clutched their daggers tightly while their bodies trembled. This was not due to the adrenaline before a battle, but due to fear.

The strong gust of wind could be felt followed by the sighting of a shadow moving at high speed.

Annie gave a long sigh and surprisingly felt more calm than ever. They had been discovered. The ghouls were here. This would be the final battle of her life.

# Chapter 223

## A Magician's Wisdom

The three ghouls seemed to be bursting with unbridled fury and pride when they first appeared. However, they were defeated in an instant and were now flinching around helplessly on the ground.

If they hadn't witnessed the scene with their own eyes, no one would have believed it. Hence, when this Magician clad in a grey robe emerged from the back of a tree, the scouts who were lucky enough to survive involuntarily walked towards him. Their hearts were filled with deep gratitude and admiration.

In the Dark Forest where danger and despair lurked in every corner, there was nothing more reassuring than the support of a powerful Magician.

Both the scout captain and the vice-captain did not survive the assault. The remaining scouts were all around Level-4 in strength, and as the daughter of a duke and the strongest scout alive, Annie hence assumed the position of temporary captain.

Link was still wearing his hood at this moment, causing Annie to not recognize him. She merely felt that this figure was somewhat familiar, though she could not point out exactly why. She walked forward and bowed respectfully, saying, "I'm Annie Abel. Dear Magician, thank you very much for your help."

She was also extremely grateful to this Magician. However, she was still devastated as the three young guards who were protecting her did not make it through the assault. This made her extremely guilty and depressed.

"I'm late. Sorry for the delay," the Magician replied in a low voice. Annie's eyes brightened upon hearing this voice. It was familiar as well.

She recollected herself and carefully observed the man standing in front of her. The more she looked at him, a figure started forming in her mind.

A faint voice started appearing in her head—could it be? No way!

He was now a Master Magician and the lord of a territory. There were even rumors that he would be one of the candidates for the next Dean of the East Cove Higher Magic Academy. How could such a prominent figure come and fight on the frontlines of the war against the Dark Elves? Even if he really wished to assist in the war, he should be positioned within the fortress as a defensive triumph card.

In the next moment, Link took off his hood and revealed his true identity. As he stared at Annie's astonished face, he introduced, "Princess Annie, I am Magician Mirose. I will be assisting you in the search for the Dawn Swordsman."

As he spoke, he winked at Annie to signal that he did not wish to reveal his status.

It really is him!

Annie was just about to shout his name when she saw his signal. She then swallowed her words and said, "Oh, it's Mr. Mirose. I am extremely honored to be able to fight alongside you."

The familiar voice and face instantly dispelled half of the heaviness in Annie's heart.

He actually came. The person who pulled Gladstone out from the clutches of the Dark Elves—the person who saved her life twice in a row had really arrived. At this moment, Annie felt as if her soul had found an anchor.

This feeling was as though a person drowning in a river and getting swept by raging currents suddenly found a solid tree branch to grab hold of, dispelling all feelings of panic and despair.

Link, on the other hand, did not feel these emotional fluctuations. Annie was simply a good friend in his memory. Furthermore, they had not met for over half a year and had grown apart.

After greeting them, he then turned to the scouts beside him and said, "Although these three ghouls are already seriously injured, they are still alive; don't kill them. Send them back to the Ice Peak. We are going to study them and find their weaknesses."

Upon hearing those words, Annie immediately selected ten scouts and said, "All of you and this group, bring these hideous creatures back."

"Yes, Your Highness." The scout quickly used ropes to secure the ghouls together, and

before long, they were prepared to return to the fortress.

Link walked over and took out a scroll and three bottles containing a thick silver liquid. He then walked up to a scout and said, "The bottles contain Sacred Silver while the scroll is enchanted with the Blessing of Light. If you meet any ghouls along the way, activate the scroll and smear the Sacred Silver onto your weapons. This should be enough to scare them away."

The scouts valued Link's advice greatly and carefully took over the precious Sacred Silver and scroll.

After that, Link turned to Annie and said, "Ten scouts might not be enough for a safe return trip. We need at least 15. Your Highness, you should return as well."

There were 21 scouts who survived the onslaught. If 15 of them were to return, there would be six left for the mission. Coupled with Link's power, this should be enough to rescue Kanorse. Furthermore, as they were infiltrating the enemy's base, a larger group might not be beneficial.

"I will not go back!" Annie shook her head firmly, "'Your Highness' does not exist during a mission. We are all simply scouts from MI3."

Link fell silent for a moment. Since the other party was not willing, there was no forcing it. He nodded. "That's fine as well."

After which, he then randomly selected five scouts and said, "You guys go back as well. Remember that the ghouls have some sort of mutual connection between them. They should already know that their comrades are gravely injured and will be on your heels. I will try to delay them for half an hour. In this time, you guys will have to rush back to the fortress at top speed. No stopping along the way! Is that understood?"

"Yes, sir!" The scouts replied in unison.

At that moment, Link's word was their command. He had a lot more power than Princess Annie as he had just displayed his unparalleled power against the ghouls. He was the absolute most powerful being in the Dark Forest.

This offensive power was what soldiers on the field looked up to!

"Alright, get going!" Link pointed in the direction of the Ice Peak Fortress.



The 15 scouts then carried the three gravely injured ghouls and rushed straight towards the Ice Peak Fortress.

Link stared at the remaining six scouts and said, "We have to do something to buy them some time."

"Please give your orders!"

Annie spoke with a respectful voice as well. She realized that the young man in front of her was no longer the shy reserved person she knew in the past. He was still as powerful and calm as ever, though he seemed a lot more dependable and firm now.

The other scouts stared at Link with admiration, waiting for his orders.

Link then said, "Pass me your daggers."

The six scouts passed their daggers to Link without hesitation. Link then took out a bottle of Sacred Silver in liquid form and activated the Magician's Hand. The 12 daggers then instantly levitated into the air before arranging themselves neatly in front of Link.

These daggers had anti-magical properties. However, Link's abilities had long surpassed such ordinary anti-magical enchantments. They were all useless against his spells.

After the daggers were arranged properly, the silver liquid floated out of the bottle. This Sacred Silver was created by Link himself and was able to maintain its liquid form due to the Higgs Field Transformation spell that Link was adept in. As the Sacred Silver made contact with the atmosphere, it quickly turned into a near transparent film. This transparent film then swiftly coated the daggers held in a neat formation. Following which, a large number of magic runes appeared in the air. These runes rotated quickly in the air while getting closer to the daggers with every spin until they finally wrapped themselves onto the daggers evenly.

The scene looked just like many fireflies dancing around the levitating daggers.

Three seconds later, Link then raised his Burning Wrath of Heavens Wand and pointed it gently at the daggers in the air, "Magic Stabilize!"

Crisp Metallic sounds reverberated through the forest as the runes knocked

themselves onto the surface of the daggers, engraving their powers on the ordinary weapons. With each sound, a clear rune symbol could be seen appearing on those daggers.

Around three seconds later, all the runes in the air disappeared, and the appearance of the dagger had changed completely.

Originally, these daggers were grey and black in color. However, they were now dark silver and a row of beautiful rune engravings could be seen running through the middle of the dagger. The runes also shone with a slight silver hue that was exceptionally clear in the Dark Forest.

What was more incredible was that all 12 daggers looked exactly the same.

The scouts all looked at the scene with disbelief. They had never seen such mysterious, enchanting magic in their entire life. Even Annie was dumbfounded at the sight.

This was actually pretty normal, as Link had already mastered the art of enchanting. For a simple enchanting processes like this with not much technical difficulty, he could do it simply with a few waves of his wand. He was too used to it.

With another action of his hand, the 12 daggers slowly floated back to the hands of the scouts.

He then said, "I have enchanted Sacred Silver onto these daggers. The ghouls would not be able to regenerate as fast if you wound them with these weapons."

Their regenerative abilities were one of the ghoul's greatest advantages.

After that, Link waved his wand again to activate the Magician Hand.

Under the surprised expression of all the scouts, the crossbows and arrows scattered around the floor all started drifting towards Link and were once again arranged in a neat formation in front of him. Link quickly swept his gaze over these weapons and decisively threw five thoroughly damaged crossbows and 20 unusable arrows away. He was then left with 20 usable crossbows and 160 crossbow arrows.

Link then once again displayed his powerful control of magic. There seemed to be countless invisible hands working on all these weapons at once, putting the arrows back into the trigger and fixing the acceleration mechanism all at the same time.

Within two minutes, the 20 crossbows were all as good as new.

Link then took out another bottle of Sacred Silver and started creating many transparent films in the air before coating the crossbows the same way he did with the daggers. Half a minute later, the crossbows had all turned dark silver though there were no changes in their physical appearance.

With a gentle flick of the wand, the crossbows flew towards the scouts. They got two crossbows each, evenly distributed amongst the remaining members.

"Take care of them. They will be your weapons against the ghouls."

The scouts mechanically took over the crossbows as they were still in awe of Link's abilities.

These crossbows were usually termed as a disposable weapon. It was extremely troublesome to fit the arrow onto the crossbow again after firing. Usually, it would take around half an hour to fix one crossbow. However, the Magician in front of them fixed 20 crossbows and even enchanted them with Sacred Silver in less than three minutes.

What he was doing was no less than a miracle.

Right after the preparations were complete, Link felt a magic fluctuation in the atmosphere. He felt a few dark creatures moving at high speed towards them. It was the ghouls!

"That was fast!" Despite his preparations, Link was still surprised at their speed.

He raised his wand and methodically cast a spell at each of the scouts. A ray of light then flowed towards the scouts like streams of water, causing them to vanish from sight.

Finally, Link then entered the stealth state himself.

A voice seemed to appear out of nowhere from the seemingly empty forest. "The ghouls are here. There are four of them. They are definitely here to observe the battlefield. Hide yourselves well and wait for your chance to launch attacks. Don't worry about them retaliating; I'll stop them!"

At the last sentence, Link's voice had already become muffled, and it was impossible to tell exactly where it was coming from.

Link's inspiration for this stealth spell came from Vance's concealing spell. However, he had made some alterations to make it a more flexible spell for individual use. The sound technique was called resonance reverberation, a spell he learned from the magic notes that the Master Magicians from the academy had given him.

Link was well versed in all these small magic tricks after being exposed to a great deal of magic materials. This included the Higgs Field spell that he just used to create the Sacred Silver.

This was where the foundation of a Magician lay.

Link had already started combining the expertise of many masters of his era, even becoming a master in his own right. Although his strongest spell was still only a Level-6 spell, his combat powers had at least double since the time he slew Tarviss.

In the forest, the scouts lay quietly in wait.

This time, they only had eight members. However, the despair that once consumed them had now turned into ambition and rage, fueling their actions. They were all looking forward to the arrival of the ghouls, as they now had an extremely powerful leader.

It was time for revenge!

# Chapter 224

## Cat and Mouse

"There's someone approaching in front!"

Behind a thicket of bushes, the Occult Dark Elf popped his head out and twitched his nose in the air.

"There's a strong smell of blood..." the Dark Elf reported. "There's the smell of human blood... and the blood of our kind... There's the stench of the evil God of Light as well."

The bush behind him rustled, and out emerged another Occult Dark Elf.

"Our comrades must've been injured, Darco," he urged. "We must go and help them."

Right after speaking, the Occult Dark Elf swiftly rushed forward.

The one called Darco hesitated for a while. In the past, he would've followed behind his comrade without the slightest pause. But now, there was a thick smell of bloodthirst in the air that was so intense that it gave him an ominous sense. There was another rustling noise behind him. Another fellow Occult Dark Elf had emerged and quickly followed the first one. He was surprised to see Darco still standing there not moving.

"Darco, what are you waiting for?" he asked. "Let's go!"

As he spoke, another Occult Dark Elf emerged. He said nothing, but he looked at Darco confusedly. His eyes seemed to be asking the same question as the previous Dark Elf.

Darco sighed and began to follow his comrades hesitantly.

The four Occult Dark Elves ran wild in the Black Forest. Their speed was lightning fast, and their footsteps were almost silent. Wherever they went, birds and beasts went silent while the bugs and snakes evaded them.

Half a minute later, their speed finally slowed down. The smell of blood in the air was

very pronounced. A little further away, they saw several human corpses lying on the ground.

"We're near the battlefield now," one of them said. "I can only see human corpses. Can any of you see bodies of our soldiers?"

"No."

"Me neither."

Darco finally caught up to them, and he observed the corpses more carefully. He hid in the most secretive spot and observed for two minutes, then suddenly pointed to a certain direction.

"Look there!" he said.

The other three Dark Elves looked where Darco pointed and saw a pile of intestines among the branches. Judging by the scent, it belonged to their comrade.

Their faces turned stormily dark, as they realized what they saw.

No matter how strong they were, to have the intestines dragged out must mean that their comrade was suffering a serious injury. While he might not yet die, there was no way he could ever fight again.

"Those human scum must've dragged this soldier's body away," yelled one of them. "We must chase after them and crush them!"

"Wait, calm down," whispered Darco. "I can sense something wrong here."

"But we must not let our soldier's body fall into the humans' hands!" another Dark Elf spat out, turning to look at Darco with eyes full of disdain. "This is the great leader's command!"

"Are you scared, Darco?" asked a Dark Elf suspiciously.

"No," answered Darco, "but I feel that we should be more cautious..." The suspicion in his comrades' eyes made it difficult for Darco to continue. But he couldn't deny the strong, ominous sense he was feeling then, even though he couldn't quite put his finger on what exactly was wrong.

His comrades had by then become impatient of his dilly-dallying.

"The facts are very clear here, Darco," the Dark Elf beside him coldly said. "Our soldiers met the human scouts, and some of them got defeated because there were too many humans. What we must do now is seek revenge!"

The Dark Elf who'd just spoken was the strongest among the four. After he finished his sentence, he stood up and waved his hand at the others.

"Let's go," he said. "We must increase our speed and kill every last one of those humans!"

He was the first to rush forward. The other two then followed him without any hesitation. Darco had no other choice, so he finally followed them in the back. The four Dark Elves did not anticipate the ambush that was waiting for them in front, so they just followed the scent that was in the air and chased after the trails of the humans.

Three seconds later, the first Occult Dark Elf stepped onto a battlefield and found another human corpse. He immediately stomped on the corpse's skull and crushed it to bits. A second later, the second and third Dark Elf arrived. Then, Darco was there as well. They were eager to catch up to the human scouts, so they ran even faster now, not suspecting at all that their might be a trap set up for them in front.

Just then, they could hear a buzzing noise in the air. The three Dark Elves charged onward when out of nowhere, transparent ripples in the air appeared. The ripples didn't cover a big area, but they were big enough to envelop all four Dark Elves inside a bubble.

It all happened so suddenly that it was impossible for any of them to make an appropriate response.

In a flash, the four Occult Dark Elves felt as if they were being pushed forward by a mysterious force. Because they were moving at such a high speed, their bodies spent 75% of the time in mid-air. Just when the transparent force field appeared, it caught them when three of the Dark Elves were in mid-air.

As a result, these three were caught completely off-guard. Even though the pushing force wasn't that strong, it was enough to make them lose their balance. Only Darco managed to avoid the trap. When the force field appeared, his feet were safely on the ground, so he had enough time to crouch down and stabilize himself. The force field

wasn't strong, and he possessed the strength of a Level-6 fighter, so naturally, he could dodge the attack easily.

"Careful, it's a trap!" he immediately shouted.

His heart was already filled with shock and alarm as he shouted the warning. After receiving the Lady of Darkness' blessings, they'd been nearly invincible in the forest and were the ones who'd always attacked the humans. Now that the situation was reversed, he couldn't help but suspect that something was awfully wrong.

Thud! Thud! Thud!

The three Occult Dark Elves were flung out and slammed into the trees. The impact wasn't serious. There wasn't even a scratch on their skin, although they did get annoyed for falling into such a simple trap.

"Damn it, it's a Magician's trap!" said one of them.

"Come out, you bastard! I'll tear you into pieces!"

"I detest Magicians the most! They're weak, and they like to play dirty tricks!"

During their fall, the three Occult Dark Elves didn't feel that they were in much danger, but they did become furious. Just when they landed on the ground and were getting back up on their feet, they were hit by another wave of attacks!

Clack, clack, clack!

A strange sound suddenly emerged out of the silent forest. In the next moment, a silvery net made of Sacred Silver appeared out of nowhere. This net captured the three Occult Dark Elves within it and because they hadn't fully recovered their balance; there was no way for them to escape.

Then, there was a sound of metal piercing through flesh followed by the loud cries of the three Dark Elves. These ghouls who were supposed to be invincible were wailing in pain so loudly that it rattled the leaves in the trees.

The tough leather of their armor, their thick skin, and their strong muscles had cushioned the impact of the arrows piercing through their skin, preventing them from harming their vital organs. However, these arrows could still cause excruciating pain



that was comparable to hornet stings!

"Ahhh! The damn humans! Kill them! Kill them!"

The three Dark Elves still had some ability to move. They'd already noticed the attackers in the bushes and tried to pull out the arrows from their skin while screaming murder at the attackers. Still, they had been injured after all. Their injuries were quite deep as well because the damned arrows turned out to be poisonous and seemed to suck the strength out of their bodies.

Their running speed was considerably slower now. It was no longer the kind of speed that no one could hide from anymore.

"Shoot!" Annie shouted.

The effects of the attack were alarmingly successful. This gave the scouts a great deal of confidence. Each of them had two crossbows, and one had already been shot, so it wasn't loaded. They then immediately shot with another crossbow and another silvery net emerged and headed towards the Dark Elves.

One of the Dark Elves stumbled as he attempted to dodge the net and the arrows shot straight into his eyeball, piercing as deep as five inches into his skull.

A brief scream escaped the Dark Elf's mouth, but it abruptly ended as he fell to the ground. Although he was still writhing about, it was obvious that he'd lost consciousness.

Darco was horrified at the sight of his comrades in pain and dying. He was the only one who escaped the ambush unscathed. He yelled out in fury and charged towards the scout nearest to him.

He was uninjured, so his powers were still at its full potential. He burst into full speed. In the eyes of a Level-4 Assassin, he would seem like a hazy shadow.

In the past, such a ghoul could easily kill eight human scouts in less than half a minute.

But this time, the situation had changed.

As soon as Darco took his first step and his body was aloft in the air due to his speed, a transparent ripple appeared in the air in front of him and slammed his body forward.

Darco lost his balance immediately and was flung forward. Although the force wasn't that great, it happened at just the right moment, causing Darco to fall into the trap completely.

Half a second later, when Darco's body landed, he learned from his comrades and did not hurry to get up on his feet. Instead, he rolled on the ground until he reached behind a tree, then slowly got himself up.

The look on his face was now full of horror.

He discovered that behind those scouts was a powerful Magician hiding in a dark corner of the forest! The Magician's level might not be that high, but his ability to find the right moment to unleash his attacks was simply terrifying. With him, the lightning speed that used to be his strongest skill was now wasted.

For a time, Darco hid behind the tree, not daring to make a single move or to attack the scouts. But even if he didn't move, that doesn't mean that the scouts would do nothing but wait.

He only stood there for two seconds when he heard the horrifying screams of his comrades again. He took a quick peek and saw that one of them had a large hole in his chest which had been filled with a silvery liquid. The Dark Elf was struggling madly to get the liquid out of his chest and was writhing in pain on the ground. It was truly a horrifying scene.

Ever since receiving the God's blessings, Darco had never felt afraid before. But at this moment, his blood had run cold.

The puzzling tactics, the hidden Magician, the fearless scouts—all these things had finally made Darco's courage fail. With a grievous sigh, he turned around and escaped from the battlefield as fast as he could. He was not their match; he must run now and report this to their leader!

However, he'd only taken a few steps before the force field appeared again. What was truly frightening was that Darco had anticipated this move and was prepared for it, yet he was still hit by the force field anyway.

Bam!

Darco was flung through the air.

He didn't give up and climbed up to his feet and started running again. But then the force field reappeared and struck at him again. Darco got up and ran again; then he fell again. He got up once more and ran only to fall yet again. He was like a mouse caught in a cat's paw. No matter how much he tried to escape, he just wasn't successful. No matter how much he tried to dodge or hide, or even crawl on the ground to escape, nothing worked. As long as he exerted the slightest amount of effort to escape, somehow the opponent was able to thwart his moves!

In short, he was now completely at the mercy of the opponent.

After his 30th attempt, Darco fell to the ground and was motionless. He was neither injured nor tired, he just gave up and accepted his fate.

How could there be such a frightening Magician in this world? Darco wondered in full horror.

# Chapter 225

## A Precarious Situation

Plop, Plop.

The three half-dead ghouls were dragged into the middle of the open space by the scouts.

It was undeniable that the vitality of these ghouls was simply rule-breaking. One of them suffered an arrow through the eye and judging from the severity of the injury; his brain must have been damaged. The other two had their heart completely squashed, and all three of them had Sacred Silver running through their blood. Despite these grave injuries that could kill an ordinary human a hundred times over, they were still breathing and very much alive!

Link came out from his hiding place but still kept his distance from the ghouls. He stood beside a tree around 60 feet away.

Annie walked towards him and whispered while staring at him expectantly, "My lord, what should we do with the three of them?"

As she had mentioned, Your Highness did not exist in the Dark Forest; there were only scouts from MI3. Since Link was now the captain, she had to address him as lord.

If this happened in the past, Link would have felt uncomfortable. However, he was now a true lord of a territory and had many followers behind him. He was already accustomed to the hierarchical system in the World of Firuman

He said, "We have no need for the three of them. Burn them with fire."

No matter how strong their life force was, burning them to a crisp was bound to work.

The scouts then collected dried branches and piled them up before throwing the three ghouls into the middle. Link then threw a fireball which ignited the flammable dried branches, starting the fire.

Under the intense heat of the flames, the three ghouls instinctively struggled and tried to escape. However, the moment they got out from the range of the fire, the scouts would use wooden sticks to push them back into the inferno. After ten whole minutes when the scouts could already smell the aroma of barbecued meat, the ghouls finally stopped struggling and fell dead.

This kind of life force had totally broken the power balance in the World of Firuman. Only the strength of a Divine Gear could accomplish this.

After dealing with these three ghouls, a scout came to report, "My lord, there is another ghoul lying over there. He is not moving."

Link naturally did not forget that guy. After all, he personally destroyed his will to fight.

"Let's go take a look."

The scouts surrounded Link to protect him and headed towards the ghoul who appeared to have no visible injuries.

Link stopped when they were still 60 feet away from the ghoul. The scouts also became more vigilant and were prepared to guard against a sneak attack from the motionless ghoul.

Annie was slightly worried and asked, "Should we shoot a few arrows to cripple him before doing anything else?"

"There is no need to," Link shook his head before telling another scout. "Please retreat in case he attacks."

Link then headed forward himself.

Annie immediately dissuaded, "Link... Sir Mirose, please be careful."

This was different from the sneak attack before. Link would have no distance advantage walking towards the ghoul like this. Even if it were to engage in a direct battle, the ghoul at his full speed could very likely give Link a mortal injury.

The scouts were also anxiously looking at the Link, afraid that something would happen to him. If he were to die, the six of them would not be able to deal with this ghoul.

Link motioned for everyone to stay calm as he continued forward. The distance between them continued to shorten, 45 feet, 40 feet, 35 feet; Link seemed to have no intention of stopping.

Darco originally had harbored no hope of surviving. However, the Magician had actually revealed himself. Furthermore, he had actually cast no defensive spells over himself. This was a god-sent opportunity!

The will to fight once again burned in his heart, "I might not have been your opponent while you were hiding in the shadows. However, now that you have appeared without any protection, I can always fight you now!"

He tightened his muscles and started accumulating his energy. The moment his opponent was 30 feet away, he would unleash all his energy and smash his head in a single strike! In his eyes, the Magician seemed to be defenseless while brazenly moving forward—33 feet, 30 feet. Now or never!

Roar! Darco opened his mouth and bellowed before hurling himself towards Link.

"Arrogant Magician, Die! Uh... Uh... What is this... What the hell... My stomach..."

After traveling only half the intended distance, Darco suddenly grabbed his throat in pain. A silver ball seemed to have entered his mouth while he screamed his war cry, swirling down into his stomach.

Following which, an unbearable pain could be felt in his abdomen. This was an extreme form of pain, as though countless knives were slashing their way through his body. He could not help but grab his stomach in suffering.

"No! No! I am a Warrior of the Lady of Darkness! I will not be defeated by this pain! I'm going to kill you!" Darco held his abdomen as he walked towards Link in small steps.

He felt as though something had contaminated his blood and his power was drained by this mysterious substance. He was getting weaker every step he took. The moment he took his fifth step, he could not hold on anymore and fell on his knees with a thud. The Magician now stood six feet away from him, unmoving. He could reach the opponent with just another step. Clearly, he needed to just hold on for a while more to defeat his opponent! But alas he failed!

This six-foot distance seemed like an insurmountable chasm at that moment!

Looking at the faint smile on the Magician's face, a deep sense of frustration and despair overwhelmed Darco. "All my actions were within his calculations. I simply cannot defeat him."

From the start, he had been suppressed by this Magician. This Magician did not use any fancy techniques. In fact, all he used were ordinary techniques known to most Magicians.

Darco's confidence was completely shattered.

In order to keep his trump card a secret, Link did not bring out the Burning Wrath of the Heavens Wand. Instead, he took out an ordinary silver wand and activated the Magician's Hand with a slight movement of his wand. The ghoul was then lifted by his chin into the air.

"Can you understand the common tongue?" Link asked.

The ghoul's eyes could be seen to avert Link's gaze. He seemed to be avoiding the question, suggesting that he could understand Link perfectly well.

"What is your name?" Link asked.

There was still no answer.

Link's wand glowed faintly which caused the little silver ball that the ghoul swallowed to wreak havoc once again.

Darco held his stomach in pain and bent his waist. He rested his head on the ground as though he was begging for mercy and said, "I'll speak, I'll speak! I am Darco!"

"Our camp was attacked by the likes of you. We have an extremely strong Warrior called the Dawn Swordsman. You should be familiar with this name?"

This was the reason why Link left this ghoul alive. He needed someone who could give them a lead. From his observations, this ghoul was slightly more intelligent and would thus be easier to reason with.

Darco shook his head, "I'll not say."

This sentence had, in fact, revealed additional information. By saying that he refused to reveal any information, it meant that he knew the details regarding Kanorse.

All that's left was to extract the information from him.

Link turned to look at Annie, "Your Highness, does MI3 have any tools to make him speak?"

Annie winked as she already knew Link's plans. She then smiled, "I am not very good at such things. But we have loads of these people in MI3; what do you say, Larson?"

A scout walked out, chuckling while playing with the dagger in his hands, "My lord, we would usually cut off the meat from the target's body piece by piece while making sure that they remain conscious. Of course, if we were dealing with ghouls, we would first enchant the dagger with Sacred Silver. I assume he would have the time of his life."

Darco swallowed a mouthful of saliva upon hearing those words. He had experienced first-hand the darned power of this silver metal. He could still feel the burning sensation in the abdomen. If that material was used to cut off his flesh... He did not even want to think about it.

Link shook his head and said, "I'm afraid that won't do. These ghouls have such a strong life force. If we cut them off piece by piece, how long will it take?"

The moment his voice fell, another scout jumped forward and said, "My lord, we have six people over here. If we work together, I'm sure we can cut off all the meat within five minutes. Furthermore, we can experiment if a ghoul can still live after losing all his flesh."

Beads of perspiration appeared on Darco's forehead.

Link then made an expression which suggested that he was considering the feasibility of this method. In this period, the perspiration on Darco's forehead became even more prominent as the stress he was feeling increased exponentially. He feared that the next moment Link spoke, he would be sentenced to this cruel and terrible punishment.

Darco did not dare to take any risks. His psychological defensive barrier had been completely breached and shouted, "I surrender! I'll tell you everything you want to know."



Link exchanged glances with the scouts. What a perfect cooperation that scared the wits out of this pathetic ghoul.

"Alright. Is the Dawn Swordsman still alive?"

"Yes, he is. However, he is gravely injured and has been brought to the Skeletal Fort."

"Skeletal Fort?"

Link was familiar with the Skeletal Fort. In the game, the Skeletal Fort was a huge story mission that contained many powerful enemies. The strongest boss in the fort was none other than the wielder of the Divine Gear, the Dark Serpent.

Although the wielder was unable to fully utilize the power of the Divine gear, the fact that the Divine gear was in her hands was enough to make her a world boss.

Link had totally no confidence in defeating her in a direct battle. In fact, Link would be lucky enough to escape alive if he ever faced that person in a battle.

Link then asked in a fearful voice, "What are you going to do to him?"

"Our boss seems to admire him, saying that he is the strongest Warrior on the continent. He has earned the right to receive the blessings of the Lady of Darkness."

Upon hearing those words, the scouts exchanged glances. They did not know the existence of the Divine Gear and merely felt enraged at those words. However, what Link felt was a chill down his spine.

Ordinary Dark Elf Warriors could already become Level-6 ghouls under the effect of the Divine Gear. If the Dawn Swordsman were to be demonized—what strength would he attain?

Who else could defeat him?

Even Link would not have the confidence of defending against him. It would definitely be a nightmare. The situation was going completely out of control. However, he knew that he had no choice but to do everything in his power to stop it from happening.

He immediately asked, "Where is the Skeletal Fort?"

"No, I cannot say any more. The boss will kill me and enslave my soul... I cannot do this... Just kill me! Kill me now! Ah! Lady of Darkness, I did not intentionally betray you! They forced me to!"

As Darco continued speaking, he became more incoherent in his speech. His expression was dazed, and his tone was showing a hint of madness. He was really going insane.

The scouts from MI3 all had experience in these situations. Upon seeing the ghoul in this state, Larson immediately walked up to Link and said, "My lord, he has been broken. There is no point in doing this any further."

Link had noticed as well. He then ignited the Sacred Silver within Darco's body, and thin silver light rays pierced him from the inside out.

Darco then fell to the ground, motionless.

"Burn him, and we will move forward to the Skeletal Fort."

After which, Link began collecting the Sacred Silver crossbows and fixed them once again to prepare for the next battle. The scouts then started collecting firewood to burn the ghoul.

Quickly, everything was settled, and the scouts were ready to move out.

Link stared at the scouts and said in a low voice, "I have no idea where the fort is, and I cannot guarantee that this mission will be a success. We will run into many enemies along the way. Everyone, are you sure you want to follow me on this dangerous mission?"

"For the Norton Kingdom!" The scouts replied in unison. Their eyes shone with a bladed resolve.

"Alright then, let's go!"

# Chapter 226

## A Truly Extraordinary Man

It was late in the afternoon, about four o'clock, and the sky had begun to turn dark. Because of the dense foliage, the Black Forest was now already as dark as the middle of the night. The bushes on the ground rustled, and four pairs of eyes that glowed dimly in red appeared on a clearing in the forest. On the ground, there was a pile of ashes, and among the ashes were four corpses burnt to a crisp.

The biting, cold wind whistled through the trees.

"These were our soldiers," said one of them.

"The damned MI3 wouldn't have this kind of strength," said the other. "Who killed them."

"They made no attempts to hide their trails at all," said another one. "Look, here's their footprints. We should catch up to them and find out who they are. Sino, Finville, both of you come with me. We'll hunt them down. Alan, go back to the Skeletal Fort and report this to the great leader!"

"Yes, sir!"

The figures split into two directions. One of them rushed into the depths of the Black Forest, while the other followed the visible trails into another direction. About three minutes later, when the dark shadowy figures completely disappeared, a voice emerged in the darkness.

"They really fell for it, Lord Mirose!" said the voice in a hushed tone, suppressing obvious joy.

Soon afterwards, several figures emerged from behind a bush. It was Link and the rest of the search party. They didn't hurry to leave the spot after killing off the first group of ghouls. They waited nearby instead to ambush the second group of ghouls.

As for the footprints that the ghouls found, it was actually Link who'd left them there

and wanted the ghouls to find them. This was a similar technique the Dark Elf Magician Lawndale Markins had used on him previously. Link and the scouts had circled a large area of the Black Forest and then came back to the original spot. That meant that the ghouls who had gone following their trails would eventually come back to this spot.

As for the ghoul who went back to Skeletal Fort, he would lead the way for Link and the scouts back to the Dark Elf's main lair.

Link looked in the direction of the lone ghoul and smiled.

"Well," he said, "now we've found ourselves a reliable guide."

His plan was a huge gamble which depended heavily on luck. If the ghouls hadn't decided to take these actions, then it would all go to waste. But fortunately, these ghouls weren't that smart, so everything went just as Link had planned.

As he spoke, Link cast the spell Cheetah's Agility on everyone.

"Let's go!" he said. "I hope our luck is good enough that we'll encounter the prisoner's cart that carries the Dawn Swordsman on our way."

And so, a group of people began to move as quickly as the wind in the forest. Soon, seven people disappeared into the depths of the Black Forest.

...

When Link and the others in the search party were following the ghoul into the dark bowels of the Black Forest, some of the scouts had been ordered by Link to bring back the captured ghouls to Icy Peak Fortress.

"Open the gates!" the scout yelled outside the fortress wall. "We've brought back captured ghouls!"

Ghouls? And captured too?

The guards on the walls were naturally frightened. The news they'd received so far about the ghouls were of how scary and invincible they were. What they'd seen were the Warriors and scouts getting pursued and killed by the ghouls and never the other way around. How was it possible for anyone to ever beat such fearsome creatures?

And they'd managed to capture one alive as well?

This couldn't be... a trap, could it?

The captain of the guards stood at the arrowslit and craned his neck to peer down and look out at the people outside the gates. He saw about a dozen scouts whose attire convinced him that they were indeed members of MI3. There were even one or two faces among them that he found familiar, whom he'd seen only hours earlier as they left the fortress with the search party for the Dawn Swordsman.

They couldn't be spies working for the Dark Elves.

"Where are the ghouls?" he asked. "Let me take a closer look!" There was still a possibility that these scouts were under the ghouls' control.

The scouts then raised up the ghouls who'd been tied up like slaves so the captain could see them more clearly.

The captain of the guards leaned over and looked down. Some soldiers were curious too, so they leaned down and tried to catch a glimpse as well.

In truth, a ghoul didn't look much different from an ordinary Dark Elf, anyway. The only obvious distinguishing feature of a ghoul was the hands. An ordinary Dark Elf's hands looked similar to that of a normal human being's, but a ghoul's hands were full of claws instead of nails.

The captain still looked doubtful, so the scouts raised the ghoul's hands to make it easier for him to discern them.

After several hours of recovery, these ghouls had regained some vigor and were now struggling to free themselves and were even growling in their deep voices.

"Do you see it now?" asked a scout. "This one had his heart ripped out and completely defeated by the Magician, but these bastards still live on and just refuse to die."

The guards' captain had seen everything plainly with his own eyes now, and while he gasped in astonishment, all the doubts in his mind vanished. He ordered the suspension bridge to be laid down.

"Report this to the generals at once," he whispered to one of the soldiers around him.

"Tell them the scouts have captured some ghouls."

No matter what had been going on lately, this was still great news for the Norton Kingdom's army.

When the suspension bridge was laid down, and the scouts brought in the three ghouls into the fortress, a large crowd of soldiers began to flock to them. They'd heard news of the ghouls all day every day, but only a few of them had ever seen what a real one looked like. Now that there was a chance, they must find a way to catch a glimpse of them.

Even the captain of the guards came to them. He didn't care much for the ghouls now. They looked just like normal Dark Elves except with claws on their hands anyway. Instead, there was something more important that he must find out from the scouts.

"Didn't you go out to search for the Dawn Swordsman?" he asked one of the scouts that he pulled aside. "Why are you here, then? Where's the princess? Why isn't she here?"

In these circumstances, it seemed that the likeliest scenario was that the search party encountered the ghouls on their way and managed to defeat them. But at the same time, there must've been some fallen scouts who were killed in the process. The fact that the princess wasn't here could only mean that she died in battle!

The princess was the Iron Duke's only daughter. If she died in battle, then that would surely create a huge problem.

The scout shook his head.

"The princess is fine," he said. "She's gone to save Lord Karnose with Lord Mirose."

"Lord Mirose?" asked a soldier there. "Who's that?"

"A Magician!" answered another scout who'd overheard the question. His tone was full of awe and respect. "He's an extremely powerful Magician!"

"Make way!" shouted a soldier. "Make way for the Grand Duke!"

As soon as they heard the words, the soldiers stepped aside immediately, making a path for the duke.

In fact, the duke hadn't arrived on his own. The generals, officers, Battle Mages and even the magistrates had followed him along.

For the soldiers, ghouls were merely frightening creatures in the darkness of the forest. They were merely curious to see what these ghouls looked like and that was all. But for those in the upper ranks of the army, these captured ghouls represented an extremely significant sentiment!

Duke Abel pushed his way through the crowd and finally saw the ghouls. He then searched through the group of scouts with his eyes, desperately trying to find his daughter.

But there was no sign of the princess among the scouts. This discovery hit him like a ton of bricks, and he sank into a dark pit of despair immediately. Was his daughter, who was often rebellious and impossibly stubborn, yet ultimately his affectionate little sweetheart, really gone forever?

For a moment, Duke Abel's eyes turned prickly hot. He found that it was difficult for him to breathe and it felt as if he were about to faint. If his adjutant hadn't quickly held him, he would have collapsed in the middle of the crowd.

After about ten seconds, the duke was finally able to calm his emotions enough to address the scouts.

"You've done an excellent job," he praised the scouts with a hoarse voice. "Now go get some rest."

He had no desire to ask them for any details of the battle. It was too soon for him to hear of the brutal way his daughter must've died, and he had no intention to shed tears in front of these soldiers.

Fortunately, the scouts fully understood what the commander must've felt. One of them quickly stepped up to inform the Duke of what had truly happened.

"My lord," he said, "the princess is safe. She is now with Lord Mirose, and they are on their way to the Black Forest to search for Lord Karnose."

"Huh?" replied Duke Abel incredulously. "What did you say?"

"Princess Annie is still alive, my lord," repeated the scout. "She is still continuing the

search and rescue mission. We were merely ordered to send these ghouls back to the fortress."

Duke Abel heaved a long sigh of relief; then he took in a sweet breath of air into his lungs. Somehow, the world seemed bright and beautiful again. He then let out a full hearty laugh.

"Excellent! Excellent!" he exclaimed. "That is good news indeed! Now, tell me exactly how the battle went. I'd like to know how you captured these damned creatures!"

Then, the same scout began to explain in detail of what happened from the time they encountered the ghouls and the sudden appearance of a Magician, to how they eventually defeated the ghouls and captured them. He elaborated on the Magician's arrangement for them to bring back the ghouls while the rest went on to rescue the Dawn Swordsman. Not a single detail was left out.

"He was very powerful," said the scout about Link. "He merely waved his wand gently in the air, and the ghoul's chest exploded!"

"He had a way to prevent the ghouls from dying," explained another scout. "Look at this one's chest. It's filled with a silvery liquid the Magician called Sacred Silver."

"He called himself Mirose," said another scout. "I will respect him for the rest of my life. I feel that every word he said was true."

"That's right," agreed another scout. "I felt like I could die for him!"

The group of scouts spoke simultaneously, and their words got jumbled up until it was quite difficult to make out what they said. But Duke Abel didn't stop them. He'd grasped the big picture of what had happened in his mind.

A young Magician had suddenly appeared when the search party was in the gravest danger. Then, he managed to kill three powerful ghouls instantly. If he hadn't heard the story from the scouts' mouths, he would've thought that it was more of a legend and less of a true account of events.

But everything they said was true, of course. And this proved that an extremely powerful Magician had come north. But who was the Magician? Why wasn't he informed of the fact?



The duke then turned to face the Magician Marco and looked straight into his eyes as if to ask him the question without saying a word.

"My lord," whispered Marco, "we must speak in private."

Duke Abel nodded gently before turning back to the scout.

"You've all worked very hard," he said. "Go get some rest. Later, there will be rewards for you. Come, get these ghouls into the chapel and let the priests see them."

A few soldiers then stepped forward and took the ghouls into the chapel. The scouts were now relieved and happy as they went back to their barracks to get some rest. On their way, they kept talking about what happened in the forest and about that powerful Magician called Mirose.

Duke Abel and the officers all went back to the command hall. Once there, the duke and the Magician continued walking until they reached a private room on the second floor.

"Will you tell me the identity of the Magician now?" asked the duke with a reproachful tone.

"My lord," said Marco meekly, "it was not my intention to conceal it from you. He only just arrived, so I just found out myself."

"You just found out?" asked the duke. "You must've known at least three hours now. Why wasn't I informed all that time?" Duke Abel was almost enraged at this point. He was the commander of the royal army, after all. How could he not have been informed of the arrival of such a powerful figure? It was outrageous!

"It was not my intention, my lord," continued Marco. He knew that he had no other choice but to inform the Duke of the truth now. "It was an order from my mentor, the dean of East Cove Academy. He thought that the less people who knew of this Magician's identity, the better, because he did not come here to join the army, but was instead on a secret mission..."

Duke Abel waved his hand to stop the Magician.

"Alright, alright," he said. "Now tell me, who exactly is he?"

"The new baron of the Ferde Wilderness, my lord," answered Marco.

Duke Abel's eyes widened, and he went silent for a long while.

"I didn't think he'd come here himself," he finally said.

In one move, he'd defeated three ghouls comparable to Level-6 Warriors and even possessed the power to prevent the ghouls from dying.

When he thought of it, Duke Abel finally sighed in relief. Now that his daughter was going to rescue the Dawn Swordsman with such a powerful Magician, then he shouldn't worry too much about her safety anymore.

Still, things were far from safe.

"That young man has an infinitely promising future," said Duke Abel after a long contemplation. "He cannot die in the Black Forest. We must do what we can. Once we've shrunk the line of defense, we must launch a full attack from all fronts!"

"But, my lord, is that wise?" asked Marco, surprised. "The threat from the ghouls are still far from eliminated."

The Duke smiled.

"It's only a ploy to distract the Dark Elf's attention," he said. "What are you worried about?"

Marco finally understood the duke's meaning and smiled.

"You're right, my lord," said the Magician. "I just failed to understand your true intentions just now."

# Chapter 227

## Arduous Progression

The Dark Forest was situated in the North. As they progressed further northwards, the colder the climate became.

Although it was already late spring, the Dark Forest still felt as though it was stuck in the harsh northern winter. The sky was permanently shrouded in dark clouds and snow would float down from the sky ever so often. There was a thick layer of snow on the ground as the chilling wind howled, piercing and cutting the faces of everyone who dared to brave this unforgiving climate.

This was already the third day into the mission. They had gone 186 miles deeper into the Dark Forest and had infiltrated into the heart of the Dark Elves Pralync Kingdom.

The scouts trudged on in the thick snow. The snow was knee deep, and every step was extremely tedious. It took a great deal of effort to pull out their feet from the thick snow.

Under the terrible conditions, the scouts still had to cover their footprints with a branch every step of the way, causing their progress to be extremely slow.

Fortunately, the messenger ghoul was not traveling at a fast speed as well. He also did not attempt to hide his footprints in the snow. Coupled with the fact that Link had locked onto his scent, they didn't have to worry about getting lost.

As they walked, a scout suddenly let out a low rumble. He had stepped on an empty plot of land and was about to be fall into the thick layer of snow.

"Levitation!"

With a small gesture, a levitation spell was enchanted onto this falling scout, stabilizing his body. The people around then carefully walked towards him and threw him a rope to grab hold of. They then pulled him out from the thick snow.

The sloshing sounds became painfully audible as piles of accumulated snow fell into

the pothole the scout had fallen into. Quickly, a hole four feet in radius and 21 feet deep could be seen. The bottom of the pothole was filled with rocks while its sides and top were infested with overgrowth. This vegetation was what held up the thick layer of snow previously, forming a natural trap.

This scout heaved a sigh of relief after reaching solid ground and said with gratitude, "Thank you, my lord."

Without that levitation spell, he would definitely have broken a bone or two. Suffering that sort of damage in this hellhole was no different from a death sentence.

Link nodded and said, "Be careful."

Following which, he stepped on top of a rock and cast an eagle eye spell to extend his vision northwards.

Link could see that right in front of them lay a few snow-capped, rugged hills. As he went further north, the trees became visibly shorter in height with half of them being submerged under the thick snow. This then slowly became an open field where vision was unobstructed.

The road in front would become even more difficult. Without the cover of the tall trees, the likelihood of their exposure would increase exponentially.

Furthermore, this was the heart of the Dark Elf Kingdom. Link could not use levitation spells to increase their traveling speed as it would leave magic traces, allowing his opponent to track them down easily. That would be akin to suicide.

After a while, Link had decided on the way forward. He said, "Head this way. Use the rope and tie it around your waist. Chain everyone together so that no one will be in danger."

"Yes, sir." The scouts hollered and immediately got to work.

Taking advantage of the time used to tie the rope, Link walked towards Annie and whispered, "Can you still hold on?"

To improve their agility, the scouts usually wore leather armor. Although their current armor had been made deliberately thicker to combat the cold climate of the North, its ability to retain heat was still average at best. Coupled with the harsh chilling wind,

the scouts would not be able to last long even with the protection of their Battle Aura.

At this moment, all the scouts wore a pale and weary expression. Annie was especially affected as her petite physique had caused her to be more susceptible to the cold. Her face seemed completely drained of vitality and would shiver from time to time.

"Not a problem... I can hold on," Annie whispered. It somehow made Link feel even more uneasy.

He then took a look at the other scouts. Although they were in a better state, they still looked extremely tired. In fact, he was also starting to feel the effects of the climate and the long trek on his body. If they continued to give chase, they might even fall to the weather before they meet the Dark Elves.

Unless they were courting death, getting warmth from magic was out of the question. The only thing Link could do was to cast an Elemental Healing spell on everyone from time to time to replenish their energy.

"This is not going to work. We need to find a place to rest." Link searched the surrounding area but only saw piles of snow and towering trees around. There was no resting area in sight.

"Forget it. Let's move," Link said as he was out of options.

The group then continued northwards with several accidents along the way. Fortunately, the rope would prevent the person from falling into the pothole, ensuring their safety.

After half a day, Annie was clearly showing signs of fatigue. She staggered as she walked and seemed to be in a state of semi-consciousness. The only reason she was still moving forward was due to her strong willpower. The other scouts were also shivering uncontrollably from the cold. The person least affected was Link as his magic robe could keep him relatively warm.

At this moment, a small hill appeared in front of them. At the foot of the hill seemed to be a snow covered wooden shed. Link cast an Eagle Eye spell on himself once again to double check his observations.

It truly was a wooden shed. It looked rundown and had no windows at all. However, it should be enough for a temporary shelter.

"Let's go there and rest for the night," Link said as he helped Annie along the way towards the shed.

The scouts naturally agreed to his idea and all staggered behind Link as they made a beeline for the shelter.

The trees were getting sparser, causing the group to feel the full effects of the chilling wind. This wind hailed from the northern arctic region, freezing everything along its way.

One could risk getting frostbite if they even opened their eyes fully in this damned hellhole.

Although the wooden shed looked near enough, it still took them half an hour before they reached the shed. Every step took a great deal of energy out of the group.

The wooden shed had a typical Dark Elven architectural design. It was colored in basic dark shades and was strangely contoured. There was even a small skull carved on the door. However, this wooden shed had already been abandoned, and only half the wooden door remained. Half of the roof had also collapsed from the weight of the snow. Luckily, the other half was still holding up strong, offering some protection from the howling wind.

After entering the shed, Link pointed his wand at the corner of the shed and said, "Sanitize."

Whoosh! A curtain seemed to have flown over the corner, bringing all the dirt and dust together with it. Link then stared at the structure of the wooden shed and used the Higgs Field spell to fix some portions that he was uncomfortable with, reinforcing the stability of this rundown shelter.

The scouts did not idle around as well. There was some abandoned furniture in the wooden shed, consisting of a few tables and chairs. While most of them were already unusable, some of them were still in good shape. They then used the damaged ones as firewood and started cleaning the good ones.

After a while, a fire was started in the middle of the wooden shed. The temperature of the shed immediately rose by a few degrees, bringing much-needed warmth.

A scout even found a broken wok. Link took a look and started fixing it with magic.

The scout then proceeded to fill the fixed metal wok with snow to boil a pot of water. Link saw this scene and remembered that he still had some food in his dimensional pendant given to him by Lucy. He then brought it out and split half of it with the scouts. The other half were meat-related snacks which he threw into the wok as part of his meat soup preparation.

Although Elemental Healing could replenish energy, it could not bring the joy and satisfaction that comes from real food. This was especially so when Link's food looked extremely delicious. He brought out stuff like smoked ribs and spicy lobster, causing the scouts to smile with glee. As they ate, their bodies which were on the verge of collapsing slowly recovered vitality.

Annie hid in the corner as she stretched her hands out close to the fire. Occasionally, she would eat a few snacks, and some vitality gradually returned to her face. However, she was generally still weak.

Link suddenly thought of a snow bear fur cloak in his dimensional pendant seeing her in this state. Though it would be inconvenient to wear it while traveling, it would be the perfect clothing now.

He then took out the coat and placed it gently on Annie. Annie then shot him a grateful smile, the gentleness in her eyes almost overflowing.

Link returned the smile and turned to the scouts before saying, "We are already very close to the arctic region, which lay at the end of the Dark Forest. The Skeletal Fort shouldn't be too far away now."

The scouts listened as an oppressive silence enveloped the wooden shed.

The scouts knew first-hand about the insane strength of the ghouls. The ghouls were already scary enough as they were—what would that suggest about the Skeletal Fort which was the base camp of these frightening creatures? Their leader was also residing in that cursed place! Every step closer to the Skeletal Fort was a step towards their demise.

Link continued, "It is getting late. We will rest here for the night and set off early in the morning. If we do not meet the team carrying the Dawn Swordsman along the way, we will grab a stray ghoul from around the Skeletal Fort to extort information."

"What if the Dawn Swordsman is already in the Skeletal Fort?" Annie asked.

This was a practical question. If the Dawn Swordsman was already inside the enemy's base, do they continue with their rescue mission? What if he was already demonized to the point of no return?

All of this depended on Link's decision. All the scouts stared at Link in wait for his answer. His decision would decide the fate of everyone in the wooden shed.

Link fell silent as he chewed on the spicy lobster dish. He felt that the usually delicious meal was not savory at all. In fact, it was extremely bitter and unappealing. This was a difficult decision and a heavy responsibility as it not only concerned the lives of everyone in the shed, but also the outcome of this war.

The scouts waited patiently for Link's answer.

After ten whole minutes, Link finally came to a decision. He said, "If the Dawn Swordsman has already reached the Skeletal Fort, we will also have to give it our all for the mission. My plan then would be to cast long distance spells from afar to distract the enemy while all of you infiltrate the base to find Kanorse. If he is already demonized by the time you find him, forgo the mission immediately and leave the Skeletal Fort. If he is still alive, rescue him. I will definitely delay the enemy for you."

The scouts nodded their heads in agreement.

This was an extremely dangerous plan. Both Link and the scouts would be putting their lives on the line for this mission. However, since this was Link's decision, they would give him their full support.

Annie asked, "Mirose, if the Dawn Swordsman is already demonized, is there any way to save him?"

Link shook his head and said, "If it were an ordinary demonization process, there would still be a chance. However, it is different this time around. There will be no going back. There should be a short period of weakness right after the demonization process is completed. If anyone of you has the chance, kill him using the Sacred Silver."

The demonization process this time was done using Divine Gear. How could a mortal's willpower fight against an object of the gods?

This made the atmosphere heavy and depressing.



Apart from the sightings of a few Dark Elves village, they were simply traveling on barren land this whole time. They had found no traces of the Dawn Swordsman or even the trails of the team that was in charge of bringing him back to the Skeletal Fort.

This could only mean two things. One was that they had missed the team that was holding Kanorse in custody. The other was that he had already reached the Skeletal Fort.

Both were bad news.

Everyone fell silent as they watched the crackling flames in their fireplace. After a while, the aroma of the meat soup Link had cooked earlier wafted into their noses. The mood was lifted slightly as they enjoyed the rich, savory broth. Link also drank some to warm his stomach.

Before long, the sky darkened. Link and his fellow comrades had been chasing ghouls for countless days without any rest and were all drained of energy. They leaned on the walls of the rundown wooden shed to rest.

Link felt tired as well. As he felt slightly cold, he curled his body into a ball to retain more of his body heat. However, he suddenly felt his body getting warmer through the night, as though a soft body was snuggling up on him. At the same time, a thick bear fur coat was covered over him as well.

It was Annie.

Link did not reject this act of goodwill in his semi-conscious state. The two of them huddled together and enjoyed the warmth brought about by the fur coat.

It was a silent night.

By midnight, Link suddenly felt a strange magic fluctuation and woke up in shock. His ears picked up sounds of people shuffling through the thick snowfield. The sound grew closer by the minute, seemingly heading towards the wooden shed they were residing in. There seemed to be two people talking in the Dark Elven language.

"It's freezing! Curse this damned weather." This was a raspy voice.

"Tch, if you said you were freezing to death in the past, I may have believed you. Now that you have received the blessings of the Lady of Darkness, you are simply making

excuses!" Another voice teased.

"Damn you. I am the one carrying this fellow the whole time. Why don't you try carrying them instead? This damned Warrior is so heavy. I can guarantee you that the armor on their body is at least 220 pounds! Ah! I need rest."

Link was excited upon hearing those words. A Warrior who was currently being carried by a demonized Dark Elf... Armor weighing more than 220 pounds... It must be an extremely strong Warrior. Might it be the Dawn Swordsman?"

Link was ecstatic. Were they really ahead of their opponents?

## Chapter 228

### Mortal, You're Not Qualified to Know My Real Name

The scouts in the old shabby cabin had all woken up.

None of them moved, though. They all looked to Link and waited for his orders. Everyone chose to turn a blind eye to the fact that Princess Annie and Link were huddled together in the same snow bear cloak. In a situation where their lives were constantly at risk, it was merely a trivial matter, hardly worth the time to mention.

Annie's face was flushed, but the light inside the cabin was too dim so no one could really see it.

Link, on the other hand, felt there was nothing to feel awkward about at all as they were only trying to keep warm. After listening to the sounds carefully, he'd determined that there were only two ghouls. He then made the gesture that they'd agreed beforehand was the signal to prepare for battle.

The ghouls weren't Magicians, so he didn't have to worry about them sensing the Mana fluctuations in the air. Thus, Link took out his wand, which was now glowing dimly, and cast the Traceless spell which worked on the whole group of people. And so, the scouts instantly vanished from the cabin.

The room now became totally silent. The scouts held their daggers tightly in their hands and waited patiently for the ghouls to arrive. They could clearly hear the voices outside the cabin. The ghouls had sensed that there was something wrong inside the cabin.

"Do you smell that?" asked a gruff voice. "Smells like tasty meat."

"Wait, it's not just that," answered the other voice. "I can smell the stench of humans too! Be careful; I hear an extremely powerful human Warrior had come to the forest."

The footsteps outside the cabin slowed down almost to a halt, and their voices became very soft. The ghouls were now slowly feeling their way into the cabin.

In that quiet moment, Link saw a notification flash on the interface. He looked at it and discovered that it was a new mission.

Epic Mission Series Activated: Skeletal Fort (Difficult)

First Step of Mission: Rescue

Mission Details: 1. Kill Occult Dark Elves. 2. Rescue the foreign Warrior. The foreign Warrior must live.

Mission Rewards: 100 Omni Points.

The words of the mission were written in a blood red color, and it was constantly flashing too. This gave off a feel of urgency and extreme danger.

The Skeletal Fort was indeed very dangerous. The gaming system didn't have to use special fonts for Link to realize that. Still, he ignored the danger signs and accepted the mission. Nevertheless, Link found this mission quite puzzling. Rescue the foreign Warriors? Could it be that the one outside the wooden cabin wasn't the Dawn Swordsman Karnose?

At that point, the soft footsteps had reached the door of the cabin. The scouts inside all raised the crossbows in their hands and pointed them at the old, shoddy wooden door.

Link took out his Mithril wand as well. He focused all his attention and waited patiently for the ghouls to appear.

1 second, 2 seconds, 3 seconds... Finally, a strongly-built shadowy figure appeared at the door with eyes glowing dimly in red. It was a ghoul!

He glanced around the inside of the cabin and saw no one there. That made him relax immediately, and he turned to his companion.

"There are signs of burning firewood," he told him, "but no one's here. Did you see anyone nearby?"

"There's no one nearby," answered another ghoul from outside the cabin.

"They must've left then." The ghoul then turned around and was about to leave the

cabin.

The ghoul was not paying attention to the situation inside the cabin and had let his guard down. This was an excellent opportunity to attack!

Without the need to wait for Link's orders, all scouts began to attack immediately!

Catcha! Catcha!

Whoosh! Whoosh!

The sound of the crossbows broke through the silence. Then, a holy net dense with arrows rushed towards the ghoul without giving it any room to dodge the attack.

The scouts were only 15 feet away from this ghoul. At this distance, the crossbow would have terrifying penetrative power. Because the ghoul was standing right in the door frame, it was very easy for the scouts to aim precisely at him.

The ghoul's eyes, heart, neck, and his other vital parts were all struck by at least five arrows.

Within two seconds, this unlucky ghoul was pierced through by 18 arrows. Both of his eyes were struck by four arrows and each of those arrows pierced through as deep as five inches into his skull. They looked like two chopstick holders.

With these kinds of injuries, there was no chance for the ghoul to survive no matter how strong his vitality was. He groaned in pain briefly, and his knees buckled immediately. His whole body was flung backwards by the sheer force of the numerous arrows.

Once he'd fallen to the ground, his body wriggled and jerked slightly although they were closer to convulsions than actual body movements. It was obvious that he was gravely injured and wouldn't be able to get up and fight anymore.

But there was another ghoul outside the cabin.

Initially, the ghoul was about to follow his companion into the cabin, but he'd been horrified by the unexpected attack. His friend had been killed within seconds by attacks that came out of nowhere.

He'd never seen such a frightening thing before!

"Ahhh!!!!"

The ghoul let out a strange, distorted scream of fear. All of his courage left him in that moment, and he turned around and fled the scene immediately.

But he'd only taken a step when a mysterious force hit his body and made him lose his balance. He was flung out and fell heavily to the ground.

The scouts in the cabin were already chasing after him when they noticed that he was about to escape, but now that they saw him falling to the ground, they wasted no time and took swift action!

They nocked their arrows, shot them, and killed off the already fallen ghoul.

Whoosh whoosh whoosh whoosh!

The scouts' aim were all very precise, so even when the ghoul was still falling in mid-air, his body had been struck by a series of arrows. When he landed, he was basically unable to move. His fate was not unlike that of his companion's.

With the two ghouls eliminated, Link waved his hand at the scouts and ordered, "Burn their bodies."

The scouts immediately rushed up and plucked out all the Sacred Silver arrows from the ghouls. They then piled up the wooden boards from the shabby cabin and ignited them into a flame. Afterwards, the corpses of the two ghouls were thrown into the fire.

Recently, they'd encountered two waves of attacks by ghouls in the forest, and this was how they always handled their corpses, so they were used to it and could do it quickly and efficiently by now. Meanwhile, Link walked to the door of the wooden cabin and saw the Warrior captured by the ghouls.

Because it was the middle of the night, it was very dark, and Link could barely see that the soldier was clad in an oddly shaped dark armor. The Warrior was very tall, almost seven feet tall, and judging by the curves of the Warrior's body; it turned out that this was a female Warrior.

Usually, a women's petite figure meant that they were usually Assassins, Archers,

swordswomen or other kinds of fighters that relied on techniques other than brute strength. Very few women had ever become Warriors because it was very difficult for them to advance much in their levels seeing that Warriors tended to rely heavily on pure physical strength.

Yet here was a female Warrior, and she was in fact still breathing. Judging by the way the ghouls were acting, it seemed that they were taking her back to Skeletal Fort.

To have the ghouls be interested enough in her that they were taking her back to Skeletal Fort must mean that her strength was quite impressive. Hence, there was no doubt now that she was a powerful female Warrior. It turned out that she really was a rare breed.

Because she was a woman, Link felt it inappropriate to check her injuries himself, so he pointed his wand at her and cast a floating spell.

The Warrior then floated in the air.

Link then used the Magician's Hand and carried her from the snow-covered ground into the cabin near the fire.

"Why don't you go and check her injuries?" he asked Annie.

"Sure," she answered.

Annie approached the Warrior and noticed that there were traces of blood on her head, so she tried to take off her helmet to check for injuries. Strangely enough, no matter how hard she tried to remove the dragon's head helmet with two delicate horns sticking out of it she just couldn't remove it from the Warrior's head.

"That's strange," Annie remarked. Then she carefully examined it and half a minute later turned to Link who was nearby and said, "It's not a helmet. It's a part of her body."

Link was stunned for a moment. Then he noticed how dim the light was in the cabin so he cast a light spell to illuminate the place better so he could see more clearly.

Then he really was taken totally by surprise. He discovered that not only was the helmet-like thing a part of her head, but the so-called armor on her whole body was, in fact, not armor at all.

At a glance, the Warrior seemed to be wearing an elaborate and luxurious scaly armor. But once examined closely, these scales all turned out to be her own skin!

The deep dark red scales covered most of the Warrior's body. Where there were no scales, the exposed skin still looked quite bizarre. It was red like the scales, yet it shone in the light and had a metallic luster. Link tried patting the skin with his wand and discovered that it made a clanging sound as if it was made of the same material as steel armor.

"What on earth is she?" Annie had never seen such a creature before.

By then, the other scouts had also finished their tasks, so they started walking into the cabin as well. They saw the strange Warrior by the light of Link's spell, and all found her fascinating and completely unlike what they'd ever seen.

"Look at her head," said one scout. "It looks like one of those dragons in the legends. Do you think she might be a Dragon Warrior?"

"Now that you mention it," said another, "that might really be the case."

"My lord, what exactly is she?" asked a scout.

Link knew exactly what she was. She was from the Dragon Clan. Furthermore, she was not an ordinary Dragon woman at all.

Her scales were fine and delicate, her dragon horns were curved and looked like steel, and her skin had a metallic sheen to it as though it was pure steel. There was no doubt about it—this Warrior was a pure-blood Dragon woman.

Pureblood Dragon People were no different from real dragons. The only difference was that when Dragon People were born, they were turned into humanoids by a magical process and were fated to keep that form for the rest of their lives. The Dragon People were very powerful Warriors and were roughly on the same level as high-level demons!

What Link found curious, though, was that from what he knew, Dragon Warriors lived in a hidden world called Dragon Valley and they rarely if ever entered this world at all. So how did this Warrior end up in the Black Forest? And how did she get herself captured by the ghouls?



"She really is a Dragon Warrior," said Link with a nod.

The Warrior's body didn't look as if she suffered many injuries. There were some wounds, but they were all shallow and not life-threatening, except for the one on her head. When Link raised her head and examined it carefully, he found that the wound was on the right side of the back of her skull. The wound was dark and swollen, although there wasn't much blood flowing out. It must've been the result of being hit by a blunt weapon, probably one of the ghoul's hammer.

Judging by her breathing pattern which was smooth and strong, Link knew that the Dragon Warrior's life was safe, so he started to cast spells to heal her.

He first cast Elemental Cure, then took out a bottle of high-grade medicinal potion. He then let Annie open her mouth before he slowly poured the potion into it.

Gulp gulp gulp...

The Dragon Warrior instinctively swallowed the potion. This meant that her injuries really weren't that serious.

After that, Link stood up and told everyone, "We've killed the two ghouls here, so we must leave this place now."

As he spoke, he cast a spell to make a stretcher out of the wooden planks found in the cabin. Then, he placed the Dragon Warrior on it and ordered two scouts to carry her as they moved to a new place. They left the wooden cabin while carefully covering the footprints they left in the snow.

"Follow me," said Link. "There's a huge boulder over there. We can find shelter from the cold wind there."

The boulder was about half a mile away, and just as the group had walked about a third of the way, the Dragon Warrior suddenly coughed gently. Her breathing then turned rapid, and her body slowly began to move. She was waking up.

Only a little more than ten seconds later, the Dragon Warrior opened her eyes. The first thing she saw was how unfamiliar her surroundings were. Then, she noticed that she was carried on a stretcher by a few human beings while a young man whose attire looked as if he was a Magician walked beside her.

It was a bizarre scene for a Dragon Warrior.

The last thing she remembered was that she came to this forest by the orders of the Queen who commanded her to investigate the power imbalance in the forest. She then encountered four ghastly beasts that kept refusing to die no matter how much she attacked them. Then, after a long battle she finally defeated them and was about to escape, but four more of the same beasts had found her, and she was overpowered and knocked unconscious.

The problem was, shouldn't the Black Forest be the Dark Elves' territory? How could there be humans here? Besides, these humans don't seem to be all that strong. Yet, how did they save her from those ghastly things?

A flurry of questions swirled around in her head. She was about to open her mouth and ask them but was stopped by the young Magician.

"This isn't the right time to be talking," he whispered. "Take some rest for now. We'll talk once we've reached a safer place."

"I can walk," she said. She'd collapsed because she'd been too tired. But now that she had recovered some of her strength, there would be no problem for her to walk now.

She then struggled up from the stretcher and managed to get on her feet. She still felt slightly dizzy, but it wasn't too bad that it would affect her movements. She then followed the scouts quietly all the way.

Just then, a notification popped up on the interface.

Rescue Mission Completed.

Player rewarded with 100 Omni Points.

Second Step of Skeletal Fort Mission Activated: Get Assistance.

Mission Details: Acquire the support of the Dragon Warrior.

Mission Rewards: 100 Omni Points.

With Link's current strength, 100 Omni Points was just an average amount, neither too much nor too little. He didn't know the true strength of this Dragon Warrior, so he

wasn't sure if it was worth it. But, he trusted that the gaming system must have a good reason to turn it into a mission.

It was just like in Gladstone when the gaming system would guide him step-by-step. In the end, he managed to complete a mission that at first seemed impossible to accomplish.

Right now, Link had decided that he would attack Skeletal Fort, so he accepted the second step of the mission without any hesitation.

Then, he turned to the Dragon Warrior.

"I'm Mirose," he said. "What's your name?"

To his surprise, the Dragon Warrior just glanced at him for a few moments without answering.

"Mortal Magician," she said, "you're not yet qualified to know my real name. But since you've saved me, you shall call me Felina."

# Chapter 229

## Your True Identity

The group quickly reached the bottom of the cliff.

This cliff was six feet tall and had a three-foot depression. The depression managed to shelter the ground below from snow which left a hollow center, forming a natural snow cave. It was a good place to temporarily hide from the chilling wind.

Everyone heaved a sigh of relief when they finally entered this warm haven.

Felina then finally got a chance to ask the burning questions in her heart. She went into an outburst, asking a series of questions, "Where am I? Who are you guys? Where are those bastards?"

Link naturally answered them in order.

After listening to the narrative, Felina stared at the humans around her in disbelief, "You people merely have a Level-4 Battle Aura. Look at your weak physique! Furthermore, your Battle Aura could at most support five battle skills. And this Magician over here, although you are Level-6 in strength, it seems impossible for you to deal with two of those monsters at once. Don't you think?"

She had personally experienced the battle prowess of those creatures. They were unusually difficult to deal with and simply would not die even after countless mortal wounds had been inflicted on them. They would be up and about in a few minutes after being gravely injured.

They were clearly only Level-6 in strength. However, they were able to completely destroy her, a young genius Warrior of the Dragon Clan. How could these weak and messed up human beings defeat them when she couldn't?

Annie was immediately infuriated. This Dragon Warrior had been arrogant from the very beginning and seemed to be bent on calling them mortals and derogatory terms that were hard on the ears. Now, she was even questioning their combat strength. It was time for her to fight back.

"You underestimate us. Sir Mirose had once destroyed three ghouls in less than half a minute's time. The two ghouls who managed to capture you were also defeated by us in less than 20 seconds. Their bodies still lay in the wooden shed we were residing in just now. If you don't believe us, you can turn back and take a look with your own two eyes!"

The scouts also started defending themselves.

Originally, they had a good impression of the female Dragon Warrior due to her gorgeous battle armor and good figure. However, all she said were words of despise and distrust. It was the last straw when she started questioning Sir Mirose's power.

"The princess is right. You can look down on us, but not on Sir Mirose! He was the one who saved your life just now!"

"Doesn't the Dragon Clan know the concept of gratitude?"

"I am a mortal alright. But you were captured by the ghouls as well. How strong can you be!"

Everyone started criticizing Felina's arrogant behavior. She then fell silent before apologizing, "Alright, I should not have said those words. I am sorry. But I am still curious—how did you guys do it?"

Annie was just about to speak when she seemed to remember something. She then turned to look at Link who gave a nod of approval.

Annie then brought out her dagger which was treated by Sacred Silver and said, "Do you see something different on this dagger? There is Sacred Silver on its surface, which can thoroughly destroy the regeneration abilities of the darned ghouls. We are also in possession of these crossbows, also treated with Sacred Silver. It can fire ten Sacred Silver arrows in four seconds. Furthermore, we have a powerful Magician with us. Now, do you think we have the power to defeat the ghouls?"

Felina observed the Sacred Silver weapons with interest. These silver weapons seemed to be enveloped in a sharp, brilliant force of light. It was peculiar, warm, yet aggressive.

She then nodded. "If Sacred Silver is truly the answer to these... ghouls, then I believe that you guys can defeat them. I once again apologize for my actions. Thank you for

saving my life."

Now that Felina's arrogance was kept in check, Link said, "As far as I know, Dragon Warriors rarely communicate with the rest of the world, unless something peculiar is happening. If you trust us, perhaps we may be of help."

His mission was to successfully get Felina's assistance.

Although he could capitalize on the prideful nature of the Dragon Clan to demand her of her assistance in return for saving her life, it would definitely leave a bad impression on Felina's side. This was hardly what Link wanted; he wished that the other party would offer to help on her own accord.

He thus had to build some sort of bridge between them.

Upon hearing these words, Felina hesitated.

If this happened when she first arrived in the Dark Forest, she would definitely sneer and give them the cold shoulder. She might even look down on them and head into the Dark Forest alone. However, now that she had seen the true terror of this hellhole, a few reliable partners would be extremely helpful.

This group of humans just saved her life and seemed to have the tools to deal with the ghouls. They could be of some help along the way.

However, she still could not put down her pride, "My mission is extremely dangerous. You guys might lose your life over it... wait a minute."

She then got an idea and stared straight at Link before asking, "This place is the heart of the Pralync Kingdom. Isn't the Norton Kingdom at war with the Dark Elves now? Since you guys are here, might you be on a mission? Maybe I can help as well."

It was the truth the Link had saved her life. She would have a peace of mind if she could return the favor.

Upon hearing these words, the scouts were elated. Link was simply euphoric; it seemed like this Dragon Lady had a much better personality than he imagined.

He then added, "The Dawn Swordsman Kanorse had been captured by the Dark Elves. We are originally here to rescue him. However, the chances seem to be slim."

As he explained, Link started smiling bitterly, and the scouts around him also had a grave expression on their faces.

"Dawn Swordsman? You mean the strongest Warrior in the Norton Kingdom, Kanorse?" Felina was shocked. Although the Dragon Clan kept themselves hidden from the rest of the world, they were still concerned about the important events that were happening, including the emergence of outstanding talents amongst other races. The Dawn Swordsman was one of those people.

He was only thirty-five years old but had already attained the strength of a Level-8 professional. He was rightfully termed as the strongest Warrior in the Norton Kingdom, or even the entire human race. He was indeed a rare talent.

Even the prideful Dragon Clan was surprised at the growth of the Dawn Swordsman. In fact, Felina had been craving to challenge the Dawn Swordsman while she was trapped inside the Dragon Valley. She had always hoped to one day complete with this said genius and determine who was stronger once and for all.

To think that he would be captured; are the ghouls really this strong?

Link nodded to confirm her suspicions, "I think that no one else can be termed as a Legendary Warrior in Firuman."

Felina was truly taken aback. Her eyes naturally emitted a silver radiance; hence, one could easily notice whenever she blinked her eyes. However, her eyes at that time were unblinking and wide opened. She was finding it difficult to accept.

"Even he was not able to stop the ghouls?"

Link continued, "That is not true as well. He was only captured after facing an army of them. We have discovered that he was sent to a place called the Skeletal Fort. Following which, an extremely powerful and evil being there will demonize him, turning him into something like a ghoul. If I am not wrong, they probably captured you for the same reason."

"Skeletal Fort?" Felina stared at Link. Link's words had sent shivers down her spine.

"Yes, the base of the Dark Elves houses the boss of the ghouls. Her power... I'm afraid it has gotten to point where mortals cannot hope to comprehend."

"Strength that cannot be comprehended? Immortal ghouls?" Felina seemed to be absorbed in her thoughts. She mumbled, "If the Dawn Swordsman were to be demonized, that would be a nightmare... The ghouls are already so strong; what kind of power could their boss possibly have? How could this world have such terrifying power?"

No one told her the answer. Link and the scouts remained silent.

Felina did not expect her questions to be answered as well. She had somehow deduced her own conclusion, muttering, "The queen had mentioned that a destructive power was upsetting the balance of this world. She had sent me to the mortal world to investigate this matter. This Skeletal Fort should be the source of that power! Ghouls should not have existed in this world!"

Link listened, and when she reached the part about the ghouls, he gave a helpless sigh. Ghouls really should not exist in this world, but alas, that was the power of a Divine Gear.

The World of Firuman was using its power to reject the presence of this Divine Gear. In order to maintain the stability of this Divine Gear, the Dark Elves sacrificed at least one hundred thousand lives!

Suddenly, Felina stared at Link. "Do you know the exact location of the Skeletal Fort?"

"I roughly know the coordinates. In fact, we were planning to infiltrate into the enemy's base after a night's rest," Link answered.

Felina's eyes widened yet again at this brazen declaration, the silver radiance in her eyes shining brilliantly. She said, "Going straight into the base to rescue someone? Just the few of you? Isn't this a suicide mission?"

Annie then said, "The Dawn Swordsman cannot be demonized. We have no choice but to do our best to prevent that from happening."

Link then laid out his hands helplessly and said, "There is never a choice in wartimes."

Felina then sighed and shook her head once more. "This mission is bound to fail. I shall not even talk about the few of you. You guys are far too weak. And you, Magician Mirose, unless your combat powers can match up to the Demon Slayer, I suggest that you forgo this mission. Don't sacrifice your lives in vain."



Her words seem a little strange. What did she mean by matching up to the Demon Slayer? Who is this Demon Slayer?

Link was slightly confused by those words. He felt as though he had heard this title somewhere before, although he could not exactly remember who it was referring to.

This was understandable as well. After defeating Tarviss, he had been extremely busy with either his magic research or the development of his territory. He paid no attention to other people's evaluation of his achievements. While the title Demon Slayer might seem familiar, he did not make the connection to himself.

On the other hand, Annie's eyes widened with glee. She then said to Felina, "You are saying that if the Demon Slayer was present, we might have a chance?"

Felina nodded. "If he was indeed here, coupled with my Level-7 strength, it might be worth a try."

Upon hearing those words, the remaining scouts sighed helplessly. The Demon Slayer was a noble with his own territory. He was also a Master Magician of the East Cove Higher Magic Academy. A person of his status and position would definitely not risk his life to come to this hellhole.

One could only hope for such miracles in their dreams.

However, Annie's eyes glowed even brighter as she turned to look at Link. This gaze was so hopeful that Link felt slightly disturbed by it.

"Who is the Demon Slayer?" Link asked as he felt something was amiss.

"He is none other than the lord of the Ferde Wilderness," Annie said excitedly.

"Oh..." Link patted his forehead and suddenly understood the situation. To think that they were referring to him all this while. When the title Demon Slayer came out of the mouth of a Demon Warrior, he immediately associated it with some sort of heroic and historical figure. He had never thought it would be him.

Since Felina had already mentioned it herself, Link did not wish to conceal his identity anymore. He turned to Felina and said, "I think I can give it a shot."

"This is not funny, Magician," Felina frowned as she sneered.

Link smiled and said, "Mirose is only my alias. My real name is... Link Morani."

The scouts swallowed a mouthful of saliva upon hearing those words. Annie stared at Link with pride written all over her white and pretty face. This young man was a hero in her heart.

Felina then opened her mouth and was once again in shock. It took her a while before she continued, "No wonder... So it is you after all."

It all made sense why they could deal with the ghouls. She was just thinking how such a powerful human Magician could appear out of nowhere without the knowledge of the Dragon Clan.

The Dawn Swordsman was the strongest Warrior in the human race, and Felina still had the guts to challenge him to a battle. However, she had no intention of doing so if she was facing the Demon Slayer. This was because he had once defeated Tarviss. She would not have been able to defeat Tarviss even if her strength doubled.

The moment she said this sentence, a glow appeared in Link's field of vision. It was a mission.

Step Two: Completed.

Player Omni Points +100

Step 3: Stealth or Force?

Task: Break through the obstructions of the Dark Elves and reach the Skeletal Fort.

Mission Reward 1: 100 Omni Points

Mission Reward 2: Elemental Affinity Bloodline (Note: Under the effect of this bloodline, all elemental spells cast by the user will have their strength increased by 50%)

Link sighed and once again accepted the mission.

# Chapter 230

## Pinched to Death

There were two types of white color in the area between the northern polar fields of the Black Forest, each distinct from the other. One was the bright and clear white, a color of purity. This was found in the snow of the North. The other was the dull white color that came with a touch of blood, like that found in bones. And the Skeletal Fort was fortress made up purely of piles of bones.

Whose bones?

Well, the great leader would tell you that as a tribute to the Lady of Darkness, the Skeletal Fort contained the bones of at least 20,000 souls. These souls were all burned to release an infinite amount of power. Their bones and skeletons were then preserved and used to build a white fortress with the length and width of 160 feet and the height of 160 feet as well.

And at the top of the fort was a bony, white hall.

At the head of the hall was the Skeletal Throne made of ivory, mammoth's tusks. Whenever there had been any major events, there a shadowy figure would appear on the throne enshrouded in a black flame.

And right now, it was one of those times where an important event had occurred.

On the Skeletal Throne sat a graceful shadowy figure, and at the same time, a sweet and pleasant voice floated in the hall.

"There's a big mouse in the forest," said the voice, "and I don't like it at all. Right now, the mouse has brought its friends too close to the fortress, yet none of my cats could catch them yet. Bruttan, Maule, will both of you be willing to catch these mice for me?"

Bruttan, a Level-7 demon was more than 13 feet tall, and his skin was black and thorny with a dagger-shaped horn on his head. He wielded a pair of giant swords each about ten feet long. He used to be a Warrior guarding the Magician Aymon's fortress. After the god-level device, Dark Serpent came to this world, he became the Warrior

guarding the Skeletal Fort by Aymon's command.

Maule, a Black Dragon Warrior with Level-7 strength, possessed amazing stature and was no less powerful than a demon. His swordsmanship was almost perfect, and he was the Skeletal Fort's main Swordsman.

Upon hearing the order, both of them bowed respectfully at the throne and said, "As you wish, Messenger of Darkness!"

Just as they spoke, there came a sudden loud scream from outside the hall.

"Ah! Aaaah! Kill me! Just kill me!!!!"

The voice carried a great amount of strength behind it, enough to shake the entire Skeletal Fort. Even Bruttan and Maule's faces showed a trace of uneasiness.

The source of the scream that rattled the fortress was the top human Warrior, the Dawn Swordsman Karnose who had just been captured and brought into the Skeletal Fort.

Only the dark shadowy figure on the Skeletal Throne remained unaffected.

"Oh, it seems that dear Karnose is not happy," said the figure. "I must go down there and comfort him. Both of you may leave now."

Then, the shadowy figure stood up, and her slender waist twisted like a snake as the figure walked slowly and casually down to the dungeons under the Skeletal Fort.

Bruttan and Maule looked at each other for a moment then turned around and left the hall. When both of them reached outside the Skeletal Fortress, there were 40 ghouls behind them, along with more than 200 scouts from Death's Hand and close to 3000 soldiers.

"Maule, we'll get half of the soldiers each," said Bruttan. "Let's see who catches those mice first."

"Hahaha, alright," replied Maule, "but what would the winner get?" in his eyes, Bruttan was nothing but a brute. Without his strength, he was basically useless. It'd be fun to see such an idiot lose to him.

"Well, let's see..." answered Bruttan, squinting at the Dragon Warrior as he considered the matter. To be honest, he'd never liked the bastard. "If you win, then I'll always obey you from then on. But if I win, you don't have to obey me; I just want to give you a big old slap in the face."

"Good! It's a deal!"

The two then divided the soldiers among themselves equally and parted ways.

...

Just a mile outside the Skeletal Fort, there was a slightly elevated mound in the forest where its peak was covered completely with snow. Link, the Red Dragon Warrior Felina, Annie, and the rest of the scouts all huddled together inside a makeshift igloo made of snow. They poked a hole through the snow and observed the movements in the Skeletal Fortress from there.

"So many bones! And so many guards!" exclaimed Annie, hardly able to contain her shock. The actual sight and scale of the Skeletal Fort had totally exceeded her imagination.

The surrounding area around Skeletal Fort was very flat, and there, one could clearly see more than 10,000 soldiers spread across the plains. Although each soldier was only comparable to a Level-1 Warrior, once their number reached 10,000, they were nevertheless a fearsome force.

"These soldiers won't leave," whispered a scout. "We can't possibly sneak into the fort."

There were just too many of them. And the closer they got to the Skeletal Fort the more heavily guarded the area was. Even if they used an invisibility spell to sneak into the place, they might still bump into a soldier who would then expose their presence.

At the moment, Bruttan and Maule stepped out of the fort in front of everyone.

"Link," Felina whispered. "They must've sensed that we're here and sent a team out for us. We could soon be discovered here."

There were just too many people on their side. There was no need for any fancy searching techniques at all with that many people. All they needed to do was search

every inch of the land, and there would be no way for Link and the rest to stay hidden.

They'd been staying in the same place for more than half an hour now. Link had mostly been silent all this while. Then, suddenly, he spoke up.

"Karnose still maintains his conscience," he whispered. "He hasn't been completely transformed by the occult yet. He can still be saved, but we must rescue him soon."

"But how?" asked Annie.

Felina only shook her head.

"Things have gotten to a more frightening point than I'd expected, Link," she said. "I don't think we can save him."

Link pretended he didn't hear it. He knew that it wasn't that the Red Dragon Warrior was unwilling to rescue Karnose, she merely didn't believe that they would succeed. If he could show her a plan that might work, he was sure that she would join in.

"We'll use the old plan," said Link. "I'll attract the Skeletal Fort's attention, and you'll sneak into the Skeletal Fortress and rescue the man. Felina, you must go too, but you're too strong so they might slow you down. You should act alone."

Felina bit her lips and furrowed her brows in doubt.

"This plan is too risky," Felina said. "There's still that ghoul leader in the fort. If we don't tempt the leader out, we'll have no chance at all."

"I know," answered Link. "But this is the only feasible plan we have. Well, we don't have much time, the Black Dragon Warrior will soon get here. All of you, get ready to sneak into the fortress. I'm leaving now!"

"Link... Be careful!" Annie urged.

"Wait!" Felina stopped him. "They've got too many people with them!"

Link ignored her. He jumped out of the snow igloo without a single hesitation and walked away without hiding his own Mana. He first cast the Cheetah's Agility spell then another spell to make his weight as light as a feather. And so, he almost flew all his way down from the mound.

On his way, a red glowing aura surrounded his body, followed by the Flame Controller's robe and his Burning Wraths wand.

He would be facing countless strong enemies soon, so he must utilize all his powers and all the help he had.

Right now, he had 300 Omni Points and a 6100-point maximum Mana limit. His Mana recovery rate could be as high as 220 points per second. With the aid from the Flame Controller's robe, the Burning Wraths of the Heavens wand, the Light Rune Stone, the Red Dragon Queen's Blessings, the Dimensional Scroll and the Prophetic White Stone—he had enough tricks up his sleeve to perform a symphony of magic!

The Black Dragon Warrior Maule could sense Link's presence immediately. He erupted into a big laugh.

Well, look at that, he thought. I've found the mouse first. Get ready to be my slave, Bruttan!

He then unleashed his Battle Aura in an explosion and charged towards the target at full speed.

There was only one target, and his Mana showed that he was just a Level-6 Magician. Maule was sure that he could easily cut this mouse up into pieces alone without anyone's help!

"Hahahaha! Prepare to get a taste of my swords!"

The swords in Maule's hands began to be enshrouded in a black flame. It was his inexhaustible Black Dragon Warrior's power. The invincible body of the Dragon People gave him the supernatural strength that allowed him to squash all his enemies in battles.

Link didn't have a single thought of retreating. Instead, he sped up even more, and the distance between him and the Black Dragon Warrior closed in ever more quickly.

On the peak of the mound, everyone else was covered in a cold sweat, especially Felina. She knew very well how powerful that Dragon Warrior was. He was a full level higher than Link, and he was followed by countless ghouls, Assassins, and soldiers right behind him.

This was like one single man facing off with an entire army. There was no doubt in Felina's mind that Link would soon be dead.

In the blink of an eye, the distance between Link and the Black Dragon Warrior was already less than 300 feet.

The black flame on the Black Dragon Warrior intensified. The moment the distance between them reached 200 feet, Maule would unleash a burst of his Battle Aura instantly. It didn't matter whether it would hit the target or not, he just wanted to interfere with the Magician's spellcasting. His Battle Aura was inexhaustible anyway, so he didn't have to worry about wasting it.

Unbeknownst to him, Link had already outpaced him.

At the distance of 300 feet, he'd done two things. Firstly, he'd activated the Clear Thoughts effect from the Flame Controller's robe. With Clear Thoughts, in five minutes he would recover about 2000 Mana points, which would then allow him to cast spells at their full power. Secondly, he'd activated a special effect from his wand, the Burning Wraths of the Heavens, that was the Flame Torrents! The Flame Torrents consumed 1500 points of Mana, and it allowed instantaneous spellcasting of any fire elemental spells below Level-7, while also increasing the spell's power by 300%. To recharge it, he must cast spells of Level-5 and above at least ten times.

But Link's wand was already charged at the moment, so he could instantly activate the first Flame Torrents now to boost his first spell.

Boom!

A giant hand appeared in the air, and each finger was about three feet thick and 15 feet long while the whole hand was about 30 feet long!

This Titan's Hand was boosted by the Flame Torrents, and its power was 300% higher than usual. It was also enhanced by the Burning Wraths wand's effect and had a further 150% boost from there. In total, the Titan's Hand was 450% more powerful than usual.

When a Level-6 spell's power was increased 4.5 times its normal strength, it would be comparable to a Level-7 spell. This made the flames of the giant hand turn blue, but because Link had controlled its power to prevent it from exploding, the brightness of the Titan's Hand's flame was not that intense. In fact, it now merely had the sheen of



metal.

The fire elements in the spell now looked like they were made of metal elements. This showed just how compacted the spell was!

The moment it appeared, it transformed into the shape of a fist immediately. Its surface now emanated a blue light so bright that you couldn't look at it directly. Then, in the blink of an eye, it traveled across 300 feet and crashed into Maule.

Wow, what fast spellcasting speed! Maule thought in amazement as his Battle Aura burst was unleashed.

Bang!

The Titan's Hand was slightly impeded by Maule's burst of Battle Aura, but the fiery hand did not collapse at all because the burst of Battle Aura had hit the part of the fist where its structure was most stable and solid. Furthermore, the Titan's Hand's own power was equivalent to that of a Level-7 spell, so it was impossible for Maule's Battle Aura which was also at Level-7 to destroy it in one move.

And thus, Maule's only chance at defeating Link had come to pass.

In the next moment, he was hit by the Titan's Fist squarely. There was a loud boom as he was hit by the brunt of the impact. Maule only had time to explode his Battle Aura to protect himself, but it was completely insufficient as he was sent flying a few feet backwards.

In that process, Maule's Battle Aura received crucial damage and was momentarily at its weakest point.

And that was when Link hit him again with an even more powerful attack. He took the chance when Maule was still in mid-air and changed the Titan's Fist back into the Titan's Hand and caught up with Maule immediately. The giant hand now held Maule in its palm and increased its temperature to its highest extreme.

This was Link's signature attack, and no one had ever been able to survive it!

"Ah... Gah... How... How did..." Maule couldn't even finish his sentence before his whole body was turned to ashes by the Titan's Hand's scorching temperature.

Everyone else watched in awe at the scene that just unfolded.

It was as if Maule had only been pinched gently by the fiery hand. But in no time at all, the proud Warrior's life was pinched out of his throat and turned instantly to ashes.

Could he be that powerful? Felina stared at the scene in a daze. She knew that there was a disparity of power between Link and herself, but she never expected the gap to be so big—even though she was the Dragon Clan's most talented Warrior!

There on the mound, a powerful opponent was killed within seconds. Link couldn't help but burst out laughing. He watched the ghouls, Dark Elves, and skeleton soldiers rush up the hill towards him. He kept the strengthened version of Titan's Hand under his complete control and rushed forward without the slightest hesitation.

This Black Dragon Warrior was only his appetizer!

Now, let the real battle begin!

# Chapter 231

## Listen to the Cackling of Fireworks

Twenty ghouls rushed forward up the hill.

Unfortunately, they had no experience in dealing with the Titan's Hand spell. Coupled with their low intelligence, they rushed forward in close proximity of one another, forming a cluster and rendering them easy targets of the spell.

"Titan's Fist!"

The Titan's Hand which just exterminated a Dark Dragon Warrior immediately turned into a fist, and with the sound of a loud explosion, the fist charged mercilessly towards the formation of ghouls.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

A series of collision sounds could be heard. The ghouls were all at Level-6 and simply could not withstand the impact of a Level-7 spell. They were thus instantaneously knocked into the air by this terrifying impact.

This scene was somehow similar to something one could see in a bowling alley. The moment the ball hit the pins at the end of the lane, the pins would scatter in all directions from the heavy impact.

Whoosh. In mid-air, the Titan's Fist once again turned into a hand and started grabbing all the ghouls in the air. The moment it captured a ghoul. It would release a high-temperature heat wave to instantly melt those damned creatures.

"Ah! Oh my god! Arrghh!" Cries of despair rang through the snowfield.

At that moment, Link was truly using his full power.

In his eyes, time seemed to be moving slower than ever. The ghouls who were knocked into the air were moving slowly through the atmosphere as though they were helium balloons, allowing him to take his pick as to which one he wished to burst first.

Under the effects of such focused and high-speed spellcasting, Link's eyes became a lot brighter and incomprehensible. A closer look would reveal a faint silver glow that surrounded his pupils. This was the brilliance of the soul that had escaped the chains of the physical body after the soul operated at its maximum capacity.

From other's perspective, they could only see the many after images of a blue, giant hand 150 feet away. The speed at which the hand was moving was way too fast for the naked eye to capture. The hands even looked unreal, and through this tangible deception, the hand was destroying ghouls at a speed no one could ever have imagined.

Within three seconds, the after images suddenly disappeared and formed back into an unmoving one floating in the air. The ghouls who were knocked into the air also never landed back onto the ground again. They were all turned to ashes in the short period of time while they were airborne.

You seem to be proud of your strong life force? What about your unlimited supply of Battle Aura? I can simply burn you to ashes with temperature that can even melt metallic substances!

After the extermination of these ghouls, the ordinary scouts of the Death Hand were next.

These were elite scouts that were all at least Level-4 in strength. This was an extremely strong army by any standards. However, in the face of a terrifying Magician, they were all as helpless as a crying infant.

"In the name of the Lady of Darkness, this is not happening!"

"This is not possible! How can a human attain such strength!"

"Run! We are no match!"

Their leader Maule was already dead. They had also witnessed the Magician exterminate the Warriors blessed by the Lady of Darkness. These ordinary Dark Elves had lost all will to fight and ran for their lives.

On the other hand, the skeleton Warriors only retained their most basic cognitive skills and knew not what fear was. They hence continued charging up the hill in mechanical movements.

After eliminating the ghouls, Link was extremely relieved. He had placed great emphasis on exterminating the ghouls. If the fight got protracted and he did not manage to kill all of them, the result of this fight might have been entirely different.

However, these ghouls had already become a thing of the past.

After killing these darned creatures, Link then withdrew from his extreme spellcasting state and canceled the Level-7 Titan's Hand spell.

This was not due to the strength limitations of the spell, but due to its insane mana consumption. During the battle just now, Link's peak mana consumption shot up to 220 Mana Points per second and 55 Mana Points per second on average. If Link continued using the spell, he would only last for around two more minutes.

Despite the disappearance of the Titan's Hand, Link continued to cast spells. He pointed the wand towards an escaping Dark Elf Scout and shouted, "Flame Blast!"

The Flame Controller Magic Robe increased the spellcasting speed of his fire elemental spells by 50%. His Burning Wrath of the Heavens Wand would increase his elemental charging speed by 200%. The combined effects of these two pieces of equipment gave Link an amazing spellcasting speed even without the Domingo Crystal.

It merely took 0.7 seconds for the Level-4 Flame Blast spell to take form. An incandescent fireball more than four feet in diameter emitting a blinding light then appeared.

"Explode!"

The 150% power boost to the Flame Blast spell was significant. The strength of the Flame Blast spell now was comparable to the one he released in Gladstone when under the effects of the Magical Murmurs potion.

In an instant, the fireball flew into the center of the group of Dark Elf scouts

Boom!

An earth-shattering bang reverberated through the snowfield. Unbridled flames and visible heat waves swept through the area where the explosion occurred. The thick layer of snow on the ground was also flung into the air together with pieces of severed

limbs torn off from the great impact.

The Flame Blast spell was still a terrifying offensive spell even though the spell was considered somewhat low for a Magician of Link's level.

Link's control over his Mana Points had already improved vastly from his time in Gladstone City. He only used 260 Mana Points in comparison to the original 320 Mana Points when casting a Flame Blast spell of the same scale of power.

This single blow at least sent half of the Dark Elf scouts into oblivion.

Link then checked the remaining Mana Points in his body. He estimated that he had 5100 Mana Points left, which was a sufficient amount for any battle. If he merely cast Flame Blast spells, he should still be able to release 20 of them.

He then stared at the distant Skeletal Fort and thought, I don't believe you can still feel safe in the fortress after I made such a commotion.

He then moved forward and threw a Flame Blast spell while traveling.

Boom! Another earth-shattering explosion echoed through the open terrain. Anyone within a ten-mile radius should be able to hear such a loud, disturbing noise.

The Dark Elf Scouts were basically exterminated. There were only a few of them left surviving. Even then, those who survived had already lost the will to fight, merely yelling and fleeing crazily into the distance.

As the skeleton Warriors saw this horrifying scene, all of them started charging towards Link. This included those that were originally guarding the Skeletal Fort.

This then created lots of unguarded spaces at the boundary, giving an opportunity to infiltrate the previously impenetrable fortress.

On the hillside, Felina then whispered to the scouts, "I'll set off now; follow behind!"

Link had already done what he could. She would not pull him down.

Annie then exchanged glances with the scouts and nodded, "Let's go. We will act as well."

The scouts then crawled out stealthily from their hiding spot and snuck into the Skeletal Fort.

On the side of the battle, Link was running to prevent himself from being surrounded by the skeleton Warriors. At the same time, he fired Flame Blast spells at spots where the skeleton Warriors were clustered together.

Boom! Boom!

Every ten seconds or so, a Flame Blast spell would appear and shatter hundreds of brittle skeletons Warriors.

This was not all.

Link was not only attacking the skeleton Warriors but also closing the distance between himself and the Skeletal Fort. He appeared to be charging straight towards the base camp.

This clear movement of aggression could be easily seen and even heard by the people around.

Demon Warrior Bruttan was one of these people. He had witnessed the entire battle scene from afar on top of a slope.

He had seen the hyperactive Maule who had just made a bet with him being reduced to just a pile of ash. He also saw the Magician kill 20 ghouls, a terrifying group of opponents that even he would have problems dealing with, in less than five seconds. The Magician was slaughtering the Dark Elves and skeleton Warriors as though they were livestock.

This was simply incomprehensible.

"Should I interfere?" Bruttan questioned himself. A few seconds later, the answer appeared in his mind, "I would rather not. I will definitely die if I charge forward right now."

However, that was not a choice as well. If the bratty young girl in the Skeletal Fort were to see his nonchalance, he would still be in trouble. He then quickly thought of a plan and shouted to the ghouls and Death Hand scouts beside him, "This Magician is way too arrogant, to think that he would dare to attack the Skeletal Fort. Let's go and kill

him!"

He brandished the sword in his hand and pointed it in Link's direction.

The ghouls and Dark Elves behind him exchanged glances. They had also witnessed the entire battle scene and knew first-hand the inhuman strength of this human Magician. Wouldn't it be suicide to charge forward?

However, the leader had already charged forward. They had no choice but to follow as much as they didn't want to. After a while, though, they all felt something was amiss. The leader seemed to be running slowly today. They could actually keep up with him easily. This was strange. Oh, he's running slowly to avoid fighting the Magician... thought the scouts.

No one exposed Bruttan's dirty trick and simply followed behind him, heading slowly but steadily towards the Magician.

...

## The Skeletal Fort

In the musty dark hall in the basement, a shadowy figure of a graceful snake seemed to be entwined with a human man of a strong build. The man was stripped completely naked, and his limbs were constrained by ropes, hanging star-shaped from the wall.

The figure slowly crept along the man's body as a sinister but gentle voice constantly sounded, "Kanorse, listen. Someone is setting off fireworks. Those pathetic mortals have come to send you off."

Kanorse wheezed and panted heavily. His eyes were blood red, and a myriad of ominous black aura seemed to be drilling in and out of his body, looking as though countless small black snakes were crawling all over him.

Upon hearing the detestable sound, he shook his head slightly to remain conscious and spoke with a muffled voice, "I will not yield! I will never give in and become a demon! I will never... never..."

"Oh. Haha! What a foolish mortal. You really think that fireworks boy will be able to save you? No, no, soon his soul will become a beautiful display of fireworks as well."



As she spoke, she slithered down from Kanorse's body and headed towards the exit of the hall.

When she exited the hall and walked up to the first level of the Skeletal Fort, she raised her voice slightly and hollered, "My dearest, are you hungry?"

Sssssss

A venomous hiss replied to her bewitching voice. Following which, a giant black-scaled snake at least three feet in width and 80 feet in length slithered out from the dark corner of the hall. The moment the giant snake reached the figure, a blinding brilliance shone from its scales. By the time this light dissipated, a black whip with a snake head at its tip had appeared in the hands of the figure.

Wielding the whip, the figure headed straight for the entrance of the fortress. It was then she saw a black-robed Magician awaiting her arrival.

The black-robed Magician sniggered upon seeing her and said, "Master, the person outside is the Demon Slayer."

"Oh, Talon, are you sure?"

"Definitely. I have seen him in combat during his fight with Tarviss at the East Cove Higher Magic Academy. I am extremely familiar with his magic fluctuation." The person talking was Blood Demon Talon, the escaped prisoner from the Tower of Azula."

"Are you confident in defeating him?" The figure asked.

"Previously, I wouldn't have been able to. However, now that I have received the blessings of the Lady of Darkness, coupled with the power of this powerful magic staff, I am more than confident in doing so."

"Alright then. Go ahead while I offer support from the fortress." The figure smiled at Talon with an alluring expression.

"Wait for my good news!"

Upon saying that line, a blood red miasma enveloped Talon's body. He then flew at breakneck speed out from the Skeletal Fort.

The figure watched as Talon prepared for battle, moving to the rooftop of the Skeletal Fort for a better view.

Upon reaching the rooftop, she saw the ball of blood red miasma already a mile away from where she last remembered. It was rapidly closing the distance between itself and the Demon Slayer.

She then sniggered, and she said, "Oh mortal, you have always overestimated your abilities. I shall wait and see which of you two is stronger, and more suitable to become my humble servant."

Her voice was still as bewitching and dreamy as ever.

# Chapter 232

## A Duel Between Master Magicians (Part 1)

On the icy fields in front of the Skeletal Fort.

When the dark red fog appeared, Link had stopped using his Flame Blast spell.

He'd now cast a total of five Flame Blasts, consuming about 1800 Mana Points. Because of the Clear Thoughts effect from his robe, his Mana was constantly recovering. Thus, his Mana was now at 3600 points, slightly more than half of what he started with.

The dark red fog moved quickly towards him, and it caused a mysterious fluctuation in the air as it traveled across the distance.

An Occult Magician! Link realized. A very strong one, too! At least Level-7!

The thought had just popped up in his mind when the dark red fog reached about 400 feet away from him and condensed into a blood-red, shadowy figure. The figure condensed even more and eventually became solid. It was now a person wearing a black robe.

In that process, Link could feel that there was an explosion of Mana like a lightning flash in the sky. Immediately afterwards, a blood-red light ring appeared in front of the black-robed figure.

As soon as that happened, alarm bells rang in Link's mind.

It's a Level-7 spell, and it's extremely dangerous!

Link knew that this must be something the opponent unleashed using special magic gear, possibly a tremendously powerful wand!

The blood-red light ring rapidly expanded in the air. In less than half a second, its diameter had reached about 15 feet. Furthermore, a large number of silky strands of blood appeared in the air surrounding it at the same time.

Link was alarmed at the sight. He'd recognized this spell now. At the same time, a notification popped up on the interface showing the spell's specific information.

Blood Rays

Level-7 Master Spell

Mana Consumption: 3900 Points

Effects: Creates a terrorizing light ray with a diameter of three feet and the range of 500 feet. This ray of light will circle around the spellcaster once and shoot out towards the target. Unless the target has the protection of an anti-magic shield that works against spells higher than Level-7, then the target will be disintegrated into a fog of blood.

(Note: You can't escape from this spell!)

Had Link been a Warrior, he would definitely turn around and flee by now. He'd run as fast as possible until he escaped the range of 500 feet from this Magician, then he'd be safe.

But he was a Magician.

If it had been a few months ago, Link would be utterly helpless against this spell. The only way out would be to use Dimensional Jump and escape. But now, he was a full-fledged Master Magician.

Within seconds, Link had found a way to deal with this frightening spell. He focused his attention and entered the spellcasting state. Then, he pointed his wand at the space in front of him and chanted, "Spatial Distortion!"

Spatial Distortion

Grade-less Dimensional Spell

Mana Consumption: 230 Points

Effects: Distorts the space and diverts the movement direction of all types of physical materials or energy forms.

(Note: Mortals, if you value your life, don't bother trying to understand the principle underlying this spell.)

This was Link's own dimensional spell. The principle around this spell was derived from his own space-time thesis and Vance's notebooks. On the surface, it didn't seem complicated at all. But, any ordinary Magician would melt their brain if they attempted to understand the complex theories that made this spell possible.

The Mana in Link's body quickly surged into the wand and took the form of an extremely intricate and mysterious spell structure. At first glance, this spell structure might even seem simple. The Mana it consumed wasn't all that much either, nothing more than a normal Level-4 spell. This made it possible for Link to complete the spellcasting within 0.01 second.

Then, as his intention directed it, the spell structure began to oscillate at high speed.

A strange occurrence then followed. In the oscillation process, no elements responded to the spell structure at all—no basic elements, no light elements, no dark elements nor any secret elements were reactive to this spell structure.

Immediately afterwards, the air in front of Link appeared to change. No—a more accurate way to describe it was that the light in front of him was twisted, and at a glance, there seemed to be a giant lens in the space in front of Link.

In the instant when this lens appeared, the Blood Ray struck it.

"Ah!!!!"

There was a roar of anger, and the thick ray of light shot out and hit Link's body.

The greatest advantage of using a light spell was that its speed was basically as fast as the speed of light. Once it was aimed and shot out, there was no way for the target to dodge it.

But precisely because of that speed, though, it was difficult for such spells to be controlled after it was cast. The aim must be locked before the spell was unleashed because once it's out, it would be impossible for the spellcaster to control it.

A moment later, the light column had reached Link, and it inevitably fell into the distorted space.

Then, something peculiar happened.

Once the Blood Ray entered the lens, the originally straight ray of light suddenly bent and took a turn around Link's body. Although the scene looked shocking, Link was actually completely unharmed.

The Bloodmage Talon was surprised for a moment and couldn't understand what he saw. He thought that maybe Link had used a teleportation spell to send the ray of light away, but he'd never expected Link to directly break down his attack like that.

But this is a Level-7 spell! Talon thought. How did he...? Could it be... a spatial spell?

As a Master Magician, it wasn't difficult for Talon to see through Link's tricks.

Of all the types of spells, only one kind could be used against spells of any level.

It could deflect any spells no matter the level, with the same amount of efficiency. For instance, even if Talon cast a Level-8, or even a Level-9 spell at Link, as long as it was a light spell, it would always get bent and distorted away from Link.

That was what set spatial spells apart from the rest.

This kind of spell was so powerful that every Magician dreamed of mastering it. Alas, these types of spells were notoriously difficult to master, difficult enough that it would make most Magicians give up!

So far, the only spatial spells that normal Magicians could master were those used to create storage gear, such as storage rings and storage pendant and so on. Yet, those that could be used in battles were of such high difficulty that you would have to be an unrivaled genius to be able to grasp its principles enough to learn it properly. So, as soon as he saw Link used this spatial spell, Talon immediately discarded his underestimation of the Magician in front of him.

It was no exaggeration that people called this Demon Slayer the true successor of the Legendary Magician Bryant!

At this point, Talon had completely condensed into his human form. He stood about 300 feet away from Link. This distance was the range limit for normal Magicians. If he took a step backwards, he'd be able to dodge the opponent's attacks. If he took a step forward, he'd be able to kill the opponent directly with his attacks.

He began to carefully observe Link, looking for another opening to attack him. His mind was so focused and preoccupied that he didn't have time to cast a defensive spell to protect himself. This was because the moment he did so Link would immediately attack him and force him into a defensive position. That would give Link the upper hand.

Talon knew that he still had a huge advantage over Link. The Skeleton Warriors were still surrounding Link and attacking him tirelessly. This meant that his attention was diverted, and there was always a chance that he would make a mistake as he fought off the Skeleton Warriors. And when that happened, Talon would pounce on him immediately!

On the other side, Link was also observing Talon.

The Magician in front of Link had eyes that glowed red. His whole body was clad in a black robe, and the peculiar wand in his hand shone with a strange green glow.

The singular wand had a cat's eye stone on its tip, and this stone was carved into a face that was screaming in horror. The green glow was from the eyes of this face.

Link recognized this wand. He locked his gaze with his opponent's every move, and the Glass Orbs kept emerging non-stop from the tip of his wand, crushing the heads of any Skeleton Warrior who dared to approach him. At the same time, he opened his mouth to utter the opponent's wand's name.

"The Century's Nightmare," Link said, "the Soul Taker's Wand."

Link had dealt with Morestern before. His wand, the Night's Stare, the Dark Arbiter's Wand, was the third most powerful epic-quality dark magic wand. But this wand, the Century's Nightmare, was the fifth.

Judging from this fact, the Magician was able to quickly cast a Level-7 spell earlier because of this wand.

"Demon Slayer," sneered Talon, "you have a big reputation yourself."

As he spoke, his eyes still carefully observed Link's movements, waiting for him to make the tiniest mistake as he unleashed his Glass Orbs.

Link didn't rush, though. He was as calm as ever, and he was waiting for an opening to

attack his opponent as well. He then took a glance at the Skeletal Fort behind the black-robed Magician.

"There's someone extremely powerful in that fort behind you," he said. "Why didn't they appear? Why did they send such a weak opponent like you to fight me?"

Talon was stunned and angered.

"When you bite the dust by my own hands," he threatened, "then you'll see how weak I really am."

At that moment, Talon suddenly noticed a movement in the corner of his eye. His eyes shone immediately when he discovered that it was Bruttan, and he was rushing towards them. In no more than half a second later, Bruttan would be joining this battle.

When that time came, there would not be a chance for this Magician to defeat both of them at once!

"You are strong, I'll give you that," said Talon with a smirk. "But you made a grave mistake in coming alone. You will meet your end soon, Demon Slayer!"

But just at this point, something unexpected occurred.

Link suddenly made a mistake. The Glass Orb that was supposed to crush a skeleton soldier's skull had missed the target, and in the end, it only broke the skull in half. The Soul's Flame inside the skeleton's brain was not extinguished, so the skeleton managed to break through Link's line of defense.

Link seemed to panic, and that's when Talon's eyes lit up.

Now was his chance!

It was a rare opening, and as long as he managed to cast a spell before Link, he would surely kill him. Almost subconsciously, Talon's Mana surged into his wand, and he prepared to cast a spell.

But just at this moment, Talon suddenly noticed a smile in the corner of Link's lips!

He was taken by surprise, so his movements slowed down by a fraction of a second.



Was that mistake deliberate? Talon wondered. Was that a trap? Or does he have another trick up his sleeve?

Doubts and hesitations were hazardous to a Magician when they were in battle, especially when both sides were Master Magicians.

No one knew what spells the opposing Magician would cast next. Sometimes, even when one Magician clearly had the upper hand, they could still be toppled and defeated at the very last second.

Link's strange smile had made Talon hesitate, and he suddenly didn't want to take any risks. He could just wait a dozen or more seconds, and Bruttan would be there. Then, he would certainly defeat Link with half the risk and effort.

He must be patient.

But could Talon afford to hesitate at such a crucial moment in the showdown between two Master Magicians?

# Chapter 233

## A Duel Between Master Magicians (Part 2)

A person who had become a Master Magician by virtue of their own efforts was definitely someone to be feared. They would by no means be an easy opponent!

Blood Demon Talon was an old undead magician who had lived for hundreds of years. He had accumulated many battle experiences over the years. In the face of such a veteran combat Magician, Link dared not make even the slightest mistake. He might be defeated in the next second if he was careless!

Similarly, Blood Demon Talon was also wary of Link's actions.

The moment he showed hesitation in attacking Link, he knew that he had made the wrong move!

This guy is truly sinister. This is his real killer move!

Due to his slight hesitation, he had unconsciously lost a bit of his control over the Mana surging through his wand. This energy would then descend into a state of temporary stagnation. In the Magician world, this phenomenon was commonly termed as Mana Inertia.

He would then have to wait if he wanted to use this Mana again.

For a Master Magician, the time taken for the state of Mana Inertia to pass was merely less than a tenth of a second. However, in this one-tenth of a second where Talon was experiencing a delay, Link seized an opportunity to attack!

To be precise, this opportunity was created by Link himself.

The Glyph of Soul trembled slightly and resonated with Link's magic fluctuation. In an instant, the Titan's Hand appeared and charged towards Talon at full speed.

Talon gritted his teeth disdainfully as he knew that his hesitation had cost him his offensive advantage. He had now gone the defensive side of the battle.

However, he did not panic, he thought, Bruttan is close by. It will be less than ten seconds before he arrives. I can do this.

In the face of the merciless Level-6 spell, the Titan's Hand, Talon decided to make a swift retreat instead of fighting it headlong. At this moment, the perfect distance he had deliberately kept between the both of them since the beginning of the battle had shown its miraculous effect.

He was 300 feet away from Link, and a spell like the Titan's Hand was considered to be a long-distance controlled spell. Usually, a distance of 300 feet would be the limit of such spells. He merely took a few steps backwards and was safely out of the attacking range.

As Talon retreated, he had already recovered from his state of Mana Inertia. He still chose to fight with a conservative strategy. Instead of aggressively trying to destroy Link, he cast a defensive spell on himself.

As time was tight, the defensive spell he cast was not an exceptionally powerful one. It was only Level-4 in strength and was not meant to defend against Link's trademark spell, the Titan's Hand. It was merely to protect him from the magic shockwaves that would occur from the casting of a powerful Level-6 fire elemental spell.

Bruttan, you have to hurry!

Talon was looking at the tall and powerful demon from the corner of his eyes this whole time. It was clear that the other party had noticed the opportunity and was running at full speed. However, he was still too far away.

Talon continued to retreat while he started charging a spell in preparation for a counter attack. This was not meant to defeat the opponent, but to instill fear in him to buy him time until Bruttan arrived.

It could be said that Talon's reaction to Link's attack was flawless. It would be near impossible for any Magician to take him down quickly if he had this type of awareness in battle. They might even be defeated while thinking that they still had the advantage if they were not careful.

However, something out of the ordinary still happened.

At this moment, his opponent cast a spell that was completely out of his expectations.

"Dimensional Jump!"

Link multitasked and made use of the in-game system to activate the Legendary support spell while controlling the Titan's Hand.

One thousand and eight hundred of his precious Mana Points were instantly used up by the in-game system. With a light humming sound, a white light enveloped his body before he disappeared from his current spot.

Talon was slightly shocked at this action but rationalized Link's actions; this guy was not stupid after all. He knew that his situation was desperate and decisively escaped. However, how far can you go with this spell? You are still dead!

Another light humming sound could be heard, and a white light appeared once again. This time around, the white light did not appear in the distance as Talon predicted, but merely 90 feet behind from Talon, exactly at his blind spot.

Talon merely felt a slight magic fluctuation behind him and suddenly felt fear in his heart. He had not yet understood what just happened.

His instinctive reaction was to turn and look behind him. And it was this instinctive reaction that cost him his chance of escaping.

Link had lost all connections with his Titan's Hand spell while he was casting the Dimensional Jump spell. He knew that the Titan's Hand should be in the midst of disintegrating at this point. However, the disintegration process would take time as well. In an instant, after Link teleported himself, he would regain connection with the Titan's Hand. However, at this moment, the Titan's Hand had already completely disintegrated. It was impossible for Link to form it back up again.

But this was not what Link was aiming for all this while. It was not the spell he needed, but the fire elements that made up the spell. This would greatly reduce his spellcasting speed for the next Titan's Hand as he saved the time needed to accumulate elemental energy!

Glyph of Soul, magic resonance, Titan's Hand!

Within 0.1 seconds, a whole new Titan's Hand appeared in the air. From an outsider's perspective, it was as if the disintegrated Titan's Hand was immediately formed into a complete one again out of thin air.

Furthermore, Link was merely 90 feet away from Talon at this point. The question of spellcasting distance ceased to exist.

Not good! Talon did not expect such a resolute attack from Link—using a teleportation spell commonly used for escaping as an offensive one instead. Is he truly not intending to run away?

It was true that Link now had no chance of escaping. However, before he would meet his doom, Talon would very likely be killed first!

"Damn it! This crazy bastard!" Talon still had one triumph card left. This triumph card lay in the powerful wand he had in his hand. He shouted, "Scream of Fear!"

Scream of Fear

Level-6 Spell

Cost: 1950 Mana Points

Effect: Deals heavy psychological damage to all enemies within a 270 feet radius. The effect of this spell depends greatly on the willpower and mental strength of the targets.

(Note: Do not use this spell on opponents with extremely strong willpower.)

A dark purple light started spreading in all directions with Talon as its focal point. The Skeleton Warriors around Talon were naturally unable to withstand this strong psychological impact, and the Flame of Soul immediately extinguished from their eyes, rendering them into a pile of brittle bones.

Well, this was the unintended side effect of the spell. Not a big deal.

In Talon's mind, Link would at the very least be slightly affected by this spell and lose his concentration for a moment. This would likely lead to a rebound of his Mana or even the disintegration of his spell, giving him an opportunity to retaliate.

However, nothing went according to his plan.

Talon had once again made a mistake. In fact, he should not have used spells that targeted a person's mental well-being in these crucial circumstances. There were simply too many variables in these spells, especially when he did not know the exact

mental strength of his opponent.

He had witnessed Link's perfect control over a Level-9 spell. If a Magician was able to control such a powerful spell just shy of Legendary status, naturally, they must have had a strong soul and willpower.

It was not that Talon did not remember this scene. The fact that Link had consecutively exceeded his expectations in this short battle had already completely destroyed his usual combat mentality.

That was the reason for all his mistakes.

When the dark purple light passed through Link's body, Link merely felt a slight impact on his brain as though he were hit on the head by a small object. There seemed to be no other effects as he continued focusing on his Titan's Hand spell.

Boom!

This attack hit Talon from a higher angle, smashing him right into the thick layer of snow on the ground. The snow was instantly melted by the Titan's Hand and crushed Talon's body all the way into the ground.

Talon was merely a Magician. Although his body was slightly more resilient than ordinary humans, it was hardly enough to withstand the full impact of a Level-6 spell. His body exploded like a bubble upon the heavy impact and was immediately roasted into a crisp by the heat of the Titan's Hand spell. Following which, Link saw a translucent light ball appear from Talon's body which quickly flew away in the opposite direction.

"Is this the physical manifestation of the soul?" Link frowned. The traveling speed of the soul was way too fast. Link was not fast enough, nor did he have the time to pursue it. This was because an extremely powerful demon was quickly closing in on him; Bruttan was now 600 feet away.

At this moment, Link had less than 1000 Mana Points left in his body. However, he still had 300 Omni Points, which would be more than enough to deal with this hideous demon.

He turned to face the demon as the tip of his wand glowed in a warm light. Link was waiting for his opponent to rush in before he made the first attack. However,

something peculiar happened. This demon stopped in his tracks and started retreating. The ghouls and Dark Elf Scouts behind him followed as well, instinctively walking backwards.

It was a funny sight as they stared warily at Link while the retreated. They continued this way until they covered a distance of 300 feet, before turning their backs against Link and running for their lives.

The Dark Dragon Warrior was already defeated, and Blood Demon Talon had already become a pile of barbecued, minced meat. They were both defeated in an instant. They would only continue charging forward if they were masochists.

Link merely laughed and did not give chase to this group of jokers. He simply turned and looked at the Skeletal Fort.

"Auselia, you can't just ignore this. Am I right?" Link chuckled.

Auselia was the name of the wielder of the Dark Serpent in the game. Link believed that in the World of Firuman, it would be no different.

In the Skeletal Fort, Auselia seemed to have felt Link's gaze. She stared at Link from a distance and said, "The Demon Slayer... He is even more perfect than I have imagined."

She lowered her head as she caressed the whip in her hand, before gently whispering, "My darling, you should be very satisfied with his soul. Am I right?"

Ssssss. The whip in her hand gave a sinister hiss. It longed for such a delicious and powerful soul.

"Then, I will capture him personally!" Auselia smiled bewitchingly.

Upon saying those words, she stood up and walked towards the edge of the rooftop. She did not stop when she hit the edges. Instead, she merely continued walking and took gentle strides across the atmosphere.

She did not cast any spells in this whole process. She simply levitated gracefully in the air, seemingly taking a leisurely stroll through the park. However, she was, in fact, heading towards Link at an insane speed.

Compared to the Magician right in front of her eyes, the Dark Dragon Warrior, Blood

Demon Talon, Demon Bruttan, and even the Dawn Swordsman paled in comparison. She would gladly give them up.

While she was in mid-air, Auselia turned to look at the Skeletal Fort. She could feel the presence of a few outsiders in her territory. She then sneered, "Magician, are you attracting my attention so that your companions can save the Dawn Swordsman? That is a pretty good idea, although it may be a tad too naive."



# Chapter 234

## If You Can't Fight, Flee!

Good. Now Link had lured out Auselia, the guardian of the god-level device. Felina and the rest should have no problem-saving Karnose in the fortress.

Just as Auselia walked out of the Skeletal Fort, there was a notification on the interface.

Mission Completed: Sneak in or Storm in?

Player is rewarded with 100 Omni Points.

Player receives the Elemental Affinity Bloodline.

Fuse Bloodline now?

Link did not answer the gaming system at once, as he thought of the terrible experience he had with body transformation previously.

He watched the looming figure of Auselia.

"How long would the transformation take?" he asked the gaming system.

Half an hour.

"Not now, then," answered Link, as he began to retreat.

Right now, Auselia's strength was far beyond Link's current powers to fight, so he decided to run for now.

But of course, in order to ensure that Felina would successfully rescue the Dawn Swordsman, he must not run so fast that Auselia couldn't catch up to him... Well, forget that. It was clear as day to Link now how frighteningly fast Auselia was!

Link thought of an idea.

"Increase maximum Mana limit," he instructed the gaming system. "Use 200 Omni Points."

Not only that, but Link also took out the high-grade Mana potion and gulped it all down. Right now, his Mana had increased to 4135 points. Then, Link unhesitatingly activated the Dimensional Jump.

He'd now burned 1800 Mana points in one move. White light began to enshroud Link's body, and an instant later, he was half a mile away from where he stood.

He looked back and saw how Auselia's figure had shrunk to a barely visible dot in the vast white snowy field.

Without wasting a second, Link continued to run.

"Lightweight!"

"Cheetah's Agility!"

With the aid of these two spells, Link jumped down from the top of a snowy slope, and he then floated in the air like a feather. After drifting like that for about 100 feet, his body started to drop. But just before he landed, he gently tapped against the snowy ground and that gave him the momentum to float further. And that was how Link managed to flee without leaving a trace of his footsteps on the snow.

His speed was still quite fast at almost about 70 feet per second. Still, it was far from quick enough. From what he'd seen, Auselia was as fast as the Wind Tiger at about 650 feet per second. Compared to that, his speed was like that of a crawling turtle. She would catch up to him soon enough.

As expected, when Link finally reached the bottom of the slope which was about 650 feet away, ten seconds later, Auselia was already waiting for him there.

"Why are you running, Link?" she asked with her enchanting voice. "Don't be afraid of me. I won't hurt you."

Auselia's voice gave Link goosebumps all over.

In the game, although her real name was Auselia, no one called her by it. She was more popularly known as the Serpent Lady. It was said that there were many players who

were charmed by her voice. Some even got turned just by listening to her speak, while others were enticed by the way she twisted her slender waist as she walked. Many players even created fan videos with lewd contents with titles like, "The Day the Serpent Lady and I F\*cked."

But that was just the game players' craze which Link himself had never taken part in. Especially now, when the Serpent Lady was trying to drag him back to the fort to transform him into an occult being. The only sensation her voice triggered in him was dread and loathing. He wanted nothing more than to get as far away from this woman as he possibly could.

Unfortunately, it was impossible to run away from her now. Even if he summoned the Storm Eagle, he wouldn't be able to fly that far away since his Mana was running low.

But Link still had some tricks up his sleeve.

He watched Auselia slowly and casually walk down from the snowy slope. He then took out the light rune stone that Herrera gave him. This rune stone contained an immense force. Judging from its aura, Link estimated that it should have the same power as a Level-7 spell. However, even this was far from enough to injure Auselia. Without some cunning adjustments, it probably wasn't enough to even slow her down.

After taking out the rune stone, Link still didn't use it straight away. First, he cast another spell—Spatial Distortion!

About 0.1 seconds later, a spherical lens with a diameter of about 6.5 feet appeared near his body. It looked just like a giant transparent glass marble.

That was the first step in Link's strategy.

Then, Link activated the light rune stone.

The light energy that it contained was triggered, and a white light suddenly appeared on the surface of the rune stone. It expanded and then erupted, but just before the eruption occurred, Link quickly threw the rune stone into the giant distorted space beside him.

Once the rune stone reached the center of the sphere of distorted space, a bright explosion of light appeared. But what was strange was that the light was distorted and trapped inside the space, never escaping from the sphere. If the rays of light were

conscious, they would think that they were traveling in a perfectly straight line, but to those observing from the outside, the light was actually just circling around in that closed sphere of distorted space.

The reason for this was simple—the space within that sphere had been bent into a ring!

At that moment, it seemed that the sphere was barely emitting any light, so it looked just as transparent as before and just as harmless.

On the snowy slope, Auselia kept on walking leisurely. She didn't think much of Link's actions as she thought that they were far too weak to pose any threat to her. In her eyes, right now it was just as if her little pet was playing with its toy. There was no reason for her to interfere with its games at all.

But soon enough, it didn't look so innocent to her anymore. The transparent ball near Link only gave off a faint light, and it looked harmless right now, but that was exactly why Auselia was stunned. Light energy was one the most difficult forces to control in the world. Once it was unleashed, there was no turning back, nor was there any way to control its path or behavior. But this Magician in front of her was using his dimensional spell to control the power of an immense source of light energy as deftly as a horseman would tame a wild horse with a bridle!

That just demonstrated astonishing wit and power!

"Ah... what an exquisite, beautiful, innocent and wise thing you are, Link," she said. "But, I'm afraid your playtime is over."

As she spoke, Auselia's speed suddenly accelerated to full speed and her outline suddenly become hazy. She then moved so fast that she seemed more like a streak of light as she rushed towards Link.

Link just stood there not moving at all. His eyes suddenly focused and turned extremely dark. He was now entering the spellcasting state.

At that moment, everything in the world seemed to move at a glacial speed, including Auselia, whose speed at the time was so fast that normal people wouldn't be able to see her clearly. But, she still wasn't the fastest opponent that Link had ever fought against. Auselia's speed was, in fact, only half as fast as Nana's.

Although this speed was still frighteningly fast, even Nana had never been able to launch a sneak attack on Link, so what chance did Auselia have?

Link's gaze was fixed on Auselia, and his spirits were calm. At the same time, he controlled the distorted space which helped him compress and control the light energy within it.

The process lasted for about half a second; Link knew that he'd reached the crucial point while Auselia was now only 100 feet away from him.

"Go!" shouted Link.

In that instant, the trapped light energy suddenly found a spot where it could escape the distorted space, and immediately, all the energy that was entombed inside now surged out through this small aperture.

In Auselia's eyes what she saw was this: Link held a wand in his hand, and in front of the wand was the giant crystal light ball. In the center of this ball, there was a purple light. When viewed from the side, this purple light didn't seem all that bright, but it did look compressed. Auselia had thought that this light didn't pose any threat at all because the power that she sensed from the light ball didn't feel that intense. But when this purple light hit her body, she could feel that it was extremely hot. She instinctively put up a Level-7 dark energy light shield.

She knew that this light wasn't bright because it was infinitely condensed and focused. When viewed from the side, it looked quite dim, but when viewed directly, it was bright enough to blind the observer's eyes. `

Buzzzz!!!

The ray of light penetrated through the Level-7 shield as if it was as thin and fragile as a soap bubble.

Bamm!!!

Auselia's forehead was directly struck by the ray of light, creating a fist-sized hole through her skull. Because of this, she lost her balance immediately and was flung out away from Link. When her body was still in mid-air, Link clearly saw a black film of light around her body which kept her protected. Link knew that even with a hole through her skull, Auselia would still not be dead. The forces from the god-level device

still protected her. Auselia was the Dark Serpent's puppet now, so she wouldn't be defeated quite so easily. With Link's current strength, there was no way that he could destroy this layer of defense around Auselia's body. Link estimated that even the presence of another Legendary Magician wouldn't guarantee that they'd be able to defeat Auselia.

Through the black film around her body, Link could see that the hole in Auselia's skull was rapidly healing and growing into new pieces of brain, muscle, blood veins and so on. This great leader of the ghouls had ten times the recovery rate compared to normal ghouls. Even a hole through her skull was just a small injury because she was no longer an independent life form. She was now a slave to the god-level device's!

Nevertheless, Link's attack still had an effect on her. She would experience severe headaches and be in a confused daze for a while. Judging from the speed of her wound's healing, it would probably take Auselia a minute to regain her senses.

This was the golden opportunity to reactivate the teleportation spell.

Buzz...

A white light enveloped Link's body, and he vanished from the spot. A moment later, he reappeared, but he didn't escape further south. Instead, he was now at the Skeletal Fort's gates.

Auselia would soon regain her senses, so Link rushed into the fortress while killing off the Skeleton Warriors he met on the way.

"Felina!" he shouted. "Annie! Larson! Get Karnose and come out now!"

Three seconds later, Link saw Felina rush out from the great hall on the first floor. She led the way wielding her weapons which were two giant dragon claws, and behind her, Annie and the rest followed. Annie and the other scouts were supporting Karnose who seemed to be enshrouded in a layer of dark energy.

Karnose seemed to maintain a shred of consciousness, but his eyes were red, and his body twitched unnaturally from time to time. It seemed that he was in a terrible condition.

Seeing that, Link felt a foreboding sense of danger. But now, there was no time left to dilly-dally, so he cast a Flame Blast at the hundreds of Skeleton Warriors.

Boom!!!

The Skeleton Warriors were all crushed to pieces, and Link rushed forward to join up with Felina and the rest.

Once he reached them, he immediately took out the Dimensional Scroll from Eleanor.

"Follow me, everyone," he whispered. "We must leave here through another realm!"

Realms could be understood in earth terms as dimensions. There were many dimensions in the universe, some expanded infinitely, some constricted themselves to form loops. Generally, humans could only survive in expanded dimensions, and those were the fundamental dimensions of our world.

A Magician, on the other hand, could enter looped dimensions as well, and these were known as the alternate realms.

In theory, there was an infinite number of alternate realms. Not all of these realms were suitable for life, though. In fact, only about ten of them were conducive to life.

But to enter an alternate realm, one would need a key.

The Dimensional Scroll that Eleanor gave Link was one such key. With it, one could then enter the realm of the soul. It could be very dangerous there, as you would see dead wandering souls, nightmarish creatures that devoured souls and so on. Nevertheless, right now this dangerous place was better than the real world where Auselia was pursuing them.

After all, entering the realm of the soul was the only way Link and the rest could escape from the Skeletal Fort and return to Icy Peak Fortress.

The rest of them who weren't Magicians didn't completely understand these concepts about alternate realms or dimensions, though. The scouts were completely flummoxed; Annie could understand parts of it, while Felina was completely familiar with it. She was the first person to respond to Link.

"Understood," she said with a nod. "Bring us in then!"

Link nodded then activated the Dimensional Scroll.

A soft whoosh followed, then the entire scene before them changed in an instant.

The rough terrain of the surrounding didn't change much, but there was no more Skeletal Fortress, no more cold wind, and no more snowy fields. The countless Skeleton Warriors had vanished as well, but everything was replaced by a huge city.

The city was full of people who looked like the Icefield Barbarians judging by their appearances and attire. Their expressions were very odd. They looked numb, their eyes were blank, and they walked around aimlessly. They even ignored Link and the rest when they walked past them.

The strange thing was that all their scalps were burnt or scalded.

"What kind of a ghostly place is this?" asked a scout.

"This is the Skeletal Fort in the realm of the soul," whispered Link. "These are the souls that hadn't been swallowed by the Dark Serpent yet. Let's move quickly now; we'll take a detour to the North. Be careful not to let yourself be seen by the Dark Serpent."

Auselia herself was not so frightening, what was frightening was the god-level device in her hands, whose attacks could easily pass through the barriers between different realms, so they must always be cautious.



# Chapter 235

## Soul Realm

Auselia could return to the Skeletal Fort anytime. The Divine Gear that she wielded indeed possessed terrifying power. Link and his group hence ran at full speed within the Soul Realm.

Two minutes later, they had successfully gotten out of the heart of the chilling and brutal Pralync Kingdom.

However, this was still less than a mile away from the Skeletal Fort. This distance wasn't far enough as they could still be easily located by the Dark Serpent. They had to keep moving forward.

"Speed up! Pick up the pace!" Link urged.

However, the others seemed to be struggling. They were not even traveling faster than an ordinary human.

"Link, my Battle Aura seems to be depleted," Annie said with a frown.

"My feet feel like lead. How can I only have such little strength?" Felina said as she trudged forward with Kanorse on her back. This would be an easy feat in the Physical Realm. However, in the Soul Realm, she felt completely exhausted after carrying him for only a short distance.

Link kept his gaze in the direction of the Skeletal Fort as he explained, "The change in the realm means a change in the principles and laws of the world. In the Soul Realm, the dominant physical force that we are used to will be suppressed. Instead, the power of the soul which we often overlook in the Physical Realm will be greatly magnified. In the Soul Realm, as long as one holds on to hope and faith, he will be granted unimaginable power."

Everyone was confused with Link's speech. They exchanged glances and saw the perplexed expression on each other's faces.

They could understand each and every word. However, when they were linked together to form a sentence, it seemed like some indecipherable code. This was embarrassing.

When Link got no reply, he turned around to see the dazed expression on everyone's faces and patted his forehead apologetically. He then decided to demonstrate it directly, "Watch carefully!"

Following which, they could see streaks of white light enveloping Link together with a dome of mild flame surrounding his exterior body. This was not a blinding brightness, but a mellow and gentle hue that extended to a foot around Link.

Before this, everyone was preoccupied with escaping and did not seem to notice this phenomenon. They now realized that Link was not the only one with this special veil over him. Every one of them possessed it as well, although none of them had a hue half as bright as Link's.

After some sort of comparison, among the eight of them, Link had the strongest glow, followed by Felina, who had a veil almost half as bright as Link. The third was Kanorse, although Kanorse's situation was slightly strange.

He was enveloped in a layer of greyish light instead. Closer inspection would reveal a few black snakes slithering in and out of his body. It looked extremely sinister.

Link explained as he ran forward, "This is commonly called the Light of the Soul. The stronger the soul, the brighter the brilliance, and thus the stronger you will be in the Soul Realm. Kanorse's situation... doesn't look too good."

Felina nodded in agreement as she was the one carrying Kanorse this whole time. She said, "His body feels ice cold, and I can vaguely hear a sinister hissing sound coming from his body. I'm afraid he is close to becoming completely demonized."

Hearing what the people beside him was saying, Kanorse unexpectedly spoke. He muttered in an extremely weak voice, "No, I can still hold on... he will not swallow my consciousness... ah..."

If he was still half-conscious, that meant that there was still hope.

Link stretched out his hand and leisurely fished the heavy and well-built Kanorse from Felina's shoulders. The ease at which he did the action made Kanorse seem as light as

a balloon.

Everyone was dumbfounded at this action. What terrifying strength! After all, Link was a Magician. After being with him this entire mission, the scouts had a good understanding of his power and his physical strength. He definitely did not possess enough strength to lift Kanorse with such ease.

"Now you see. This is the power of the soul. I did not use much strength. I simply thought that I wanted to bring him over, and I imbued that action with enough trust and willpower. Following which, I was able to bring him over easily."

The scouts still seemed to be confused over this strange phenomenon, while Annie and Felina seemed to be thinking about something.

After a few seconds, Felina similarly stretched her hand and took over Kanorse from Link's shoulders. She seemed to be doing it with relative ease as well. She then laughed heartily and said, "I see what you mean now. Magician, you are indeed really knowledgeable."

Link nodded, "That is correct. Alright, we need to speed up. Trust me, all of you will be able to do it!"

These scouts were all elite scouts from the Norton Kingdom. After two successful demonstrations, they were able to achieve some sort of success with movement within the Soul Realm and were able to pick up the pace. This was especially so for Annie. Her speed in the Soul Realm was even faster than her top speed in the Physical Realm, allowing her to trail behind Link and Felina with ease.

"This is amazing."

"How interesting."

"Hey Magician, if I believe that I am able to fly, will I really be able to fly in the Soul Realm?" Felina asked.

Link shook his head and answered, "That would be difficult. The laws of physics that bound the Physical Realm also apply to the Soul Realm. You would be able to fly if you believed hard enough, but it would come at a great cost. There is a limit to the power of the soul as well. Alright, we have to speed up, the master of the Skeletal Fort should be catching up soon."

They then began their escape with solemn expressions on their faces.

After half a minute, everyone suddenly felt that their hearts were especially heavy, as though a large stone was placed upon it. They then looked upwards and saw that the original grey sky had turned a few shades darker. The more terrifying thing was that their speed seemed to have decreased greatly, their legs feeling as though they were trudging through mud.

"What is happening?"

"How is this possible?"

"Is it here?" Felina turned to look at Link.

Link had a serious expression on his face as he turned to look at the sky above the Skeletal Fort. The rest followed his gaze and were horrified at what they saw.

A black-scaled anaconda at least 15 feet in width and more than 600 feet in length had appeared in the sky. It seemed to be levitating in the sky as though it was weightless.

The brilliance on its body was even more terrifying. From afar, it looked as though its body was encircled in pitch black flames from hell. Under the influence of these flames, the skies within a ten-mile radius had all turned many shades darker.

It looked as though the end was coming!

At this time, they were only a little more than a mile away from the Skeletal Fort. They could still clearly see the actions of this giant anaconda. Instead of chasing after them, the giant anaconda made a sucking action the moment it opened its mouth.

Immediately, they saw many souls flying towards the terrifying mouth. Although these souls looked emotionally numbed, they still gave a desperate scream of despair when they knew what was going to happen to them.

This was the cry of the soul and was especially traumatizing to an ordinary human. The scouts were completely heartbroken by the scene, and even the Dragon Warrior Felina went pale from the heart-wrenching scene.

Annie asked Link in a trembling voice, "Why is it devouring souls?"

Link signaled for everyone to keep running as he explained, "I have injured the wielder of the Divine Gear, Auselia, just now. In order to rescue Auselia, it had consumed some of its internal power. For a Divine Gear to maintain a stable presence in the World of Firuman, it needs to have a constant supply of energy. Alas, souls are the largest and most efficient source of energy one could ever find in this world."

Link decided to stop hiding the facts and came clean with what he knew.

The moment everyone heard this speech, they all staggered and tripped over their steps.

What did they just hear? Divine Gear? Isn't it just a giant snake? Since when did it become a Divine Gear? What is their correlation?

Felina was as shocked as any one of the scouts. She suddenly remembered something and spoke with a voice that trembled violently, "The Dark Serpent... The weapon of the Spider Queen, Lolth? Oh, God of the Dragons, bless me, no wonder it could destroy the balance of the world! It is a Dark Divine Gear. To think that I am fighting against a Divine Gear—I must be mad!"

This was an even greater blow to the scouts. They had always thought the person in the Skeletal Fort was merely an extremely powerful Magician. They had never imagined it would be a Divine Gear at work.

Thinking back upon their actions of infiltrating the Skeletal Fort, everyone felt a chill down their spine.

"What do we do now? We will not be able to defeat the Divine Gear. We will not be able to escape," a scout cried in despair with a hint of whimpering in his voice.

Everyone looked at Link. The Magician who had gotten them safely out of many predicaments and seemed to be extremely knowledgeable was their last source of hope.

Link still had a calm expression on his face and not a shred of doubt could be seen. This was massively reassuring.

He spoke calmly and said, "Don't panic. There is nothing to fear. Although it is a Divine Gear, it is still merely a weapon and has its limitations. Look at it now; it seems to be alive in the Soul Realm, devouring souls like no tomorrow. In fact, it is merely a

projection of the Divine Gear in the Physical World. Most likely, Auselia is currently using the weapon to absorb souls. Most importantly, she doesn't seem to have noticed us yet."

The Divine Gear was indeed strong. However, Auselia was not. The Divine Gear could bestow Auselia with many powerful skills, but it would not be able to increase her intelligence. This was Link's chance.

After hearing Link's words and making sure that the Divine Gear was merely absorbing souls while staying stationary, they managed to somehow suppress their feelings of fear.

Link then clapped his hands and encouraged, "Alright, we simply have to keep running until we are out of danger."

There was nothing more to say, and they ran for their lives at top speed.

Link followed behind the group and would look behind him from time to time to glance at the Dark Serpent's movements. As he watched, an in-game message appeared in his field of vision.

Triggering Epic Series Mission: Skeletal Fort Step 4

Mission: Escape

Content: Escape from Auselia's pursuit; Kanorse must stay alive and remain conscious.

Reward 1: 200 Omni Points

Reward 2: Level-7 Glyph of Soul

Two hundred Omni Points was not much. However, the Level-7 Glyph of Soul was extremely enticing. Link had once enjoyed the convenience that came with the Glyph of Soul and simply could not give this up. He accepted the mission without any hesitation and continued to run.

After two more minutes, he realized that the Dark Serpent in the sky had already stopped the devouring of souls. It started looking around and after ten seconds or so locked its gaze in Link's direction.

Link was horrified. Could he be exposed? However, it did not take him long before he realized what was happening. The Dark Serpent was not looking for him, but Kanorse. Kanorse was enveloped in the power of the Divine Gear, allowing the opponent to locate him easily.

In other words, if they did not dispel the snake venom in Kanorse's body, the group was akin to holding a torch in the darkness. They would never escape Auselia's pursuit.

This was horrible!

However, more horrible things started happening—the Dark Serpent in the sky started moving towards them!

Felina also realized the peculiar actions of the Dark Serpent and could not help but cry out, "It is coming towards us—such insane speed! What do we do?"

This was a Divine Gear. They had no intention of going up against it in a direct battle.

Link had naturally realized this as well. In fact, he had found more details, saying, "Don't panic, it's not the end yet. We are in the Soul Realm, and the opponent is unlikely to know where we are. Look at it; it is still looking for us!"

Everyone immediately looked over, and sure enough, the Dark Serpent was slithering around in the air without any direction. Although it was traveling in the correct general direction, it would sometimes make a wrong turn and was not exactly advancing towards them.

"Alright, we are heading north right now. We have to run at full speed. The moment we go past the Dark Forest and reach the Ice Peak Fortress, we will have won the battle!"

Everyone was excited at the thought and followed Link's footsteps. They made a detour before heading north.

In the Soul Realm, they were progressing at a much faster pace. They could cover 150 feet per second. As the distance between the Dark Serpent and the group widened, they regained confidence and their ability to run at an even faster speed. After running for more than half an hour, the Dark Serpent was already completely out of sight.

Link encouraged, "See, the Divine Gear is not as terrifying as we thought."

Upon seeing this scene, everyone heaved a sigh of relief and moved even faster forward.

After another hour, they had already covered over a hundred miles and were well into the Dark Forest. Many trees appeared in the Soul Realm, and in addition to the fact that there was no snow on the ground, the surface of the trees was also emitting a faint light. It looked almost exactly the same as the Physical Realm, only a bit dimmer.

Suddenly, Felina came to a stop and gasped, "That is weird; did you guys see a shadow run past?"



# Chapter 236

## The Alternate Black Forest

In the alternate Black Forest of the Soul Realm, the light was dim, yet the trees were glowing faintly. When one stared into the distance, everything merged into a muddled haze, and there was no way to discern anything clearly at all.

After hearing what Felina had to say, everyone stopped in their tracks and looked around suspiciously.

Just as the crowd was on alert, the strangest noise emerged out of nowhere.

"Caw caw... Caw caw caw... Hahahaha..."

It sounded like someone was laughing... and it sounded as if the monster that was laughing was standing right behind them.

Everyone was shocked. Link was no exception.

Swoosh! Clang!

Everyone pulled out their weapons and held them tightly in their hands. They stood in a circle with their backs against each other and their eyes facing the source of this bizarre laughing noise.

Link cast an Illumination spell, although its effect was very weak in the Soul Realm. The brightness of the spell was less than one-tenth of its original and wasn't much brighter than a firefly.

Link tried to improve things by focusing all his attention onto the spell.

Get brighter! Get brighter! Get brighter! he chanted in his mind.

Then, a strange thing happened. The light seemed to hear Link's thoughts and quickly got brighter. Soon, the magic light was bright enough to illuminate an area with the radius of about 20 feet. Further in the distance, it looked as if a thick fog blanketed

over everything, turning the surroundings into a single blurry picture.

"Do you see anything?" asked Link. He was looking left and right trying to catch anything out of the ordinary. Still, he couldn't find anything.

"No."

"I don't either."

"That's strange," said Felina. "I clearly saw it just now. It was about seven feet tall, it had a large head, and it moved at lightning speed."

"Are you sure you didn't just imagine it?" asked Annie.

"Are you doubting a Dragon Warrior's eyes?" retorted Felina coldly, displeased with Annie's question.

Link believed that Felina saw what she thought she saw.

"Which direction did you see it?" he asked. If it had been other people who saw the dark shadow, Link would probably suspect that they'd made a mistake. But Felina was a Level-7 Warrior; there was no way that she would make such a silly mistake.

Felina pointed to a bush nearby that was more than three feet high.

"Over there," she said. "I saw it stand by the edge of the bush watching me in the corner of my eye. But the moment I turned to face it, it ran away."

Link directed the ball of light towards the bush that Felina had just pointed to. The area around the bush then became illuminated, and everyone's eyes turned to its direction to observe its surroundings.

"I don't see any signs of anyone passing through here," said Annie a few minutes later. "What about you guys?"

"Me neither," answered the scouts, all shaking their heads.

Things seemed to get stranger now. Based on Felina's descriptions, the shadowy monster had a large head and moved at a fast speed. It was impossible for someone like that to leave absolutely no trace behind."

"But that's impossible," said Felina, flummoxed. "I did see it very clearly. How could this be?"

Link sensed that something was not quite right.

He couldn't find any explanations for what was happening. He'd entered the alternate realm before in the game to complete some missions, but each time the journey was brief and uneventful. Simply said, he'd never experienced anything quite so odd as the situation they were currently in before.

He just didn't know what to expect here anymore. What creatures dwelled in this realm? What would happen to them? He just didn't know. He had a vague feeling that they were being watched by some creature, but he had no idea how to deal with it.

If they continued this way, Link feared that something bad would happen.

Link looked up at the sky again through the gaps between the branches and leaves. It was dark and gray, and he could feel a certain pressure which indicated that the Dark Serpent still followed them; it was not that far behind.

This completely crushed their decision to use this path to return to the physical realm from here.

"Let's move closer together," he said after considering it for a while. "Make sure none of us get separated. Felina, you walk in front, I'll walk in the back, and Annie, you and the rest walk in the middle."

The Soul Realm might contain some kind of power that affects the mind. Among them, he and Felina possessed the strongest souls, so they would be the most resistant to that kind of influence. It was wisest to let the scouts walk in the middle.

Everyone nodded silently and adjusted their formation, then continued their journey.

As they went deeper into the Black Forest, the trees got denser, and the forest got darker and darker. If it wasn't for the faint glow that the trees emitted, they wouldn't be able to see their own fingers stretched out in front of them.

Hahaha... Hahahahaha...

Just when they least expected it, the laughter was heard again, and it almost gave them

a heart attack.

Soon after, in the middle of the party, a scout called Eric suddenly turned around and stared into the dense forest then smiled.

"Oh, Ally, my dear daughter..." he murmured. "You're still alive! Ally..."

He was about to walk away from the rest of the group and into the depths of the forest.

The other scouts hurried forward and pulled him back while shouting his name.

"Eric! Wake up!" they yelled. "Eric! Eric! Get it together!"

They slapped his face as they shouted his name, but the scout didn't respond to them at all. The eerie smile remained on his face; it was as if he was in a state of bliss.

After a while, his body no longer moved, then a faint shadow slipped out of his body which then flew quickly into the forest, vanishing from their view. When they looked at Eric again, they found that he'd stopped breathing.

"He's dead," said Larson. He looked at Link with eyes full of horror.

The expressions on the other scouts were no different.

The whole forest turned dead silent for a while. This realm had now gotten even scarier than they'd expected.

"That's what it looked like!" Felina shouted suddenly. "The dark shadow I saw earlier moved with the same speed as the shadow that came out of Eric's body!"

Felina's voice helped Annie regain her senses. She then carefully inspected the direction the shadow moved earlier.

"There's no sign on the ground at all," said Annie.

"Was it Eric's soul just now?"

"He was murmuring the name Ally just now," said Felina. "Who's Ally?"

"Ally is the name of his dead daughter," answered a scout who was Eric's friend. "She'd

fallen into the river and drowned because of Eric's negligence. He'd always blamed himself for her death."

"Then was it Ally's voice just now?" asked Felina. "Or was it something else that pretended to be Ally to lure Eric?"

The scouts all stared at each other, each imagining scarier things in their heads.

"I've got a bad feeling about this," said Felina to Link. "What should we do now?"

Link frowned deeply now. He looked up into the sky and saw that it had become dark and heavy with clouds. Nonetheless, the pressure he felt from the Dark Serpent was much relieved from what he felt before. They must be quite far away from the Dark Serpent now. This made Link decide to take out the Dimensional Scroll again.

"I don't think we should stay long in the Soul Realm," said Link.

He then directed his Mana into the scroll, and a mysterious aura emanated from the scroll and spread out into the surroundings. Then, just as a drop of ink spread in a glass of water, the world gradually turned brighter, and the colors became more vivid. The white snow appeared, and the frigid wind began to whistle through the air.

Even though they knew that they were still in the Dark Elves' territory and were still chased by someone with a god-level device, the sight of this familiar realm made everyone heave a sigh of relief.

"God of Light!" shouted one of the scouts suddenly, "we've entered the Dark Elves' mass grave!"

Because of the ongoing war, the Dark Elves' graveyard had a large number of corpses that were just dumped here to rot. Some of them were humans, and some were Dark Elves, while hanging from the trees were many executed human soldiers.

A gust of wind blew through, and it brought with it the unbearably rancid stench of decaying corpses.

"This is a cursed site!" exclaimed Felina with a scowl. "Let's get out of here now!"

Naturally, there was no reason to stay in this place for long. After identifying the right direction, they then continued to journey south. However, not long afterwards, Felina

suddenly began to tilt her head as if to listen more carefully to a sound in the air.

"Link, listen!" she whispered. "Someone is chasing us. They're very fast, and judging from the footsteps, I think there must be about 30 of them."

Link cast the spell Civet's Ear on himself and tilted his head to listen as well. Seconds later, he turned back to Felina and the rest and frowned.

"This is bad," he said. "By the sound of their footsteps, they must all be ghouls. There's one demon Battle Mage with them as well. They must've discovered us. I think the mistress of Skeletal Fort must be among them too."

Link's outstanding memory meant that he could recognize the same person again after only hearing their footsteps once. That was how he knew that the demon was the one who had previously retreated on the fields near the Skeletal Fort. Even though he wasn't the most courageous fighter, the demon was still at Level-7, so he mustn't be underestimated.

"We are about three miles away from them," said Felina. "With the ghouls' speed, I'm afraid it's too late for us to run."

There were seven of them. Link didn't have much Mana left, and although Felina was a Level-7 Warrior, she was still outnumbered. The four scouts were all Level-4 Assassins, so they were no match for the ghouls. Karnose, on the other hand, was on the verge of transforming into a demon. Not only was he unable to fight, he was dead weight at the moment.

It seemed that they were cornered into a dead end in this realm!

"We'll enter the Soul Realm again," said Link after some contemplation. "Once we've evaded them, we'll come back. That's the only choice we have."

Everyone looked at each other and nodded silently, resigned to their fate.

Link once again took out the scroll, triggered it with his Mana, then the world's color faded again and transformed into the dark, gray and creepy alternate Black Forest.

"Let's move as fast as we can to get as far away from the ghouls as possible!"

...

In the Black Forest of the normal realm.

Auselia who was chasing Link and the rest at full speed suddenly sensed something. She stretched out her hand to stop the ghoul beside her from moving.

"Those mice have run into a hole again," she said. "This isn't fun anymore."

"What should we do then, Messenger of Darkness?" asked Bruttan.

Auselia went silent for a while before answering.

"I need a Magician who can enter the alternate realm," she finally said. "We're only about 50 miles away from the Black Lake. Why don't you go back to Horton Tower and fetch me Master Aymons? I need his wisdom."

"I'll be on my way immediately!" answered Bruttan eagerly. He knew that Auselia was unhappy with him, so he must show his enthusiasm now. After receiving the order, he quickly turned around and rushed towards the Black Lake.

Auselia stared at the Black Forest in front of her and pursed her lips. She seemed to have gotten into a gloomy mood.

"My precious," she whispered as she gently caressed the whip in her hand, "I'm very sorry, darling. I haven't gotten you a fresh soul yet. But don't worry, it won't be long now. Yes, it will soon come to pass."

...

At the same time, a solitary young lady walked along the southern border of the Black Forest. She had a pair of pure and bright eyes, and her facial features were exquisite. She wore a lovely sleek blue dress, and she had a small sword on her waist. She stood at the edge of the Black Forest and looked up at the tall spruce of the forest. Suddenly, she stopped moving completely.

"Master's information is lost, re-testing... Testing failed..."

The expression on her face was dull and emotionless. Soon her crisp and toneless voice emerged again, "Enable probability analysis... Start fuzzy tracking..."

After a pause, the young woman rushed into a direction in the depths of the Black

Forest.

She was very fast, and after moving only about 10 feet, there was an explosion in the air. Then, the young woman disappeared into the forest. Wherever she passed, the birds flew away, and the small creatures hid in their burrows and nests as if a ferocious beast had just crawled past.



## Chapter 237

### May The People Who Love Me Suffer No Despair

Not long after entering the Soul Realm again, Link felt his heart palpitating at an insane rate, as though he was being targeted by a ferocious beast.

This was the premonition of a powerful Magician.

Something must have gone wrong, Link thought.

The Dark Forest in the Soul Realm appeared as sinister and gloomy as before. The usual cool forest breeze, cheerful chirping of the birds as well as the majestic growls of the beasts were absent. The forest seemed dead and silent.

Looking at the road ahead, Link knew that he had to do some preparations to add one more trump card to his hand.

He then checked his current status. He still had 200 Omni Points and an Elemental Affinity Bloodline that he still had not activated.

The Omni Points should definitely be kept for extremely crucial moments. However, the Elemental Affinity Bloodline would be a convenient and useful buff for any battles ahead. All elemental spells he cast would have their power increased by 50%, and while this would not work as well in the Soul Realm, it would have a pretty decent effect in the Physical Realm.

The only problem with this was the great pain that accompanied the transformation process. This pain would render him completely incapacitated.

As he was hesitating, an in-game message suddenly appeared in his field of vision: Pain can be reduced by extending the time required for the transformation

Oh? There is such a choice? Link was tempted and asked, On the grounds that it wouldn't affect my thinking processes, how long would the transformation take?

Two hours.

Confirm transformation! Link thought.

Upon giving approval to the in-game system, Link felt a sharp pain shot through his entire body. It was as though a pebble was grinding all his organs with just the right amount of force to cause extreme discomfort.

When this feeling first struck Link, he was breathless and almost lost consciousness. It was only after ten minutes that Link slowly grew accustomed to the pain.

It was still an acceptable level of pain similar to when he overdosed on the Mana Recovery Potion. Link tried not to focus on the pain and observed his surroundings instead.

As he was not paying attention to his surroundings previously, he did not realize that they were now within a cloud of thick fog. The visual obstruction of the mist, coupled with the natural dim lighting of the Dark Forest, caused their vision to be limited to a nine-foot radius.

"Look, there is a dark figure in the mist!" A scout suddenly pointed at the area beside them and shouted.

Everyone immediately turned to that direction and could clearly see a dark figure skidding past them at an incredible speed.

Felina's description was correct. The figure was indeed around six feet tall and had a strong physique. It was also extremely fast.

Link also saw the creature; he probably saw it in greater detail than everyone else. In his eyes, this figure had a pair of glimmering golden eyes. It was human-shaped with claw-like hands and a long slender tail behind its back.

It really is a Nightmare Beast!

Link had seen similar beasts in the game before. He remembered these creatures were termed as Heart Demons in the game. Although they did not possess strong battle capabilities, their auras had an extremely peculiar and powerful property. Under the effect of their auras, people would lose their rationality and would easily fall into the soul trap they had carefully prepared. The victims would then become the delicious meal of this Heart Demon.

The best way to deal with these creatures was to travel in groups. If they looked out for one another, the chance that they would fall into such traps would greatly decrease.

However, this Heart Demon had just eliminated a scout using its sinister tactics. It must be an extremely powerful one. They still had to be wary of it.

Link then immediately shouted, "Don't panic! This is a Nightmare Beast. Sacred Silver weapons are equally effective against it. Prepare yourselves and commence attack the moment it appears!"

Everyone's confidence was bolstered by Link's words. Their greatest fear was their lack of knowledge of this mysterious creature that dwelled in the Soul Realm. Now that Link had already analyzed the situation and even provided them with the means to deal with the creature, the fear in their hearts had mostly dissipated.

The mist became thicker as they progressed forward. Before long, the visibility in the area was reduced to a six-foot radius.

They huddled together so as to not get lost in this dangerous place. They continued in this state for around half an hour before another accident happened.

Kanorse, who had been lying on Felina's shoulders all these while, started roaring loudly. His roar was strange, sounding extremely violent and ferocious, as though he were an unrestrained beast.

Claws had grown from his usually cleanly trimmed fingers, and as he frantically struggled to get out of Felina's grip, the sharp claws grazed Felina's back a few times. The sound of claws scratching against bare flesh was extremely unnerving.

"Ah!" Felina could not suppress Kanorse's strength any longer and screamed in pain. She then instinctively threw Kanorse off her back. The moment he made a hard landing on the ground, he growled ferociously at the group before preparing to flee into the forest.

However, after just a few steps, he placed his hands on his head and knelt on the ground before bellowing, "No! No! I will not fall! I am Kanorse! The strongest Warrior!"

He had obviously reached his limit.

Link immediately rushed towards Kanorse and handed over a bottle of liquefied

Sacred Silver to him while he was still conscious. He then shouted, "Drink this! Now!"

Using Sacred Silver to suppress the powers of darkness was an extremely devastating method. Link would not have used it if it were not the last resort.

Kanorse grabbed the bottle as though it was his saving grace and gulped it down without any hesitation.

The moment the Sacred Silver touched his mouth, it started sizzling and white mist could be seen appearing from his mouth. Kanorse then started howling in pain while he continued to pour the remaining Sacred Silver into his body. By the time he was done, the flesh around his mouth had already been completely corroded by the Sacred Silver.

It did serve its purpose after all.

The dark aura that was surrounding Kanorse had diminished greatly, and the blood red hue covering his eyes seemed to have faded as well. However, the Sacred Silver had also destroyed his body.

He became extremely weak and laid helplessly on the ground as he stared at the sky, muttering, "Oh God of Light, please save my soul! Please!"

As he repeated the lines over and over again, two streaks of tears rolled down his cheeks. The strongest Warrior in the World of Firuman was broken. He did not want to fall to the dark side. He definitely did not want to become a ghoul that would kill off many people of the human race. But he was going to lose it soon!

Everyone stayed silent while Annie walked up to Felina and prepared to bandage her wounds.

Kanorse's outburst had left a deep cut on Felina's back. Her armor was already stained with blood by the time Annie reached her side.

"Hold on, use the Sacred Silver dagger to first cut off the surrounding flesh," Link ordered.

Felina knew that this was to prevent the dark forces from infecting her mind as well. She hence endured the pain while Annie started working on the wound upon Link's instructions.

Fortunately, Annie's actions were quick and finished the treatment of the wound in less than five minutes.

"Thank you," Felina whispered.

She felt no anger looking at Kanorse, who was now lying powerlessly on the ground. Instead, her heart was filled with pity and regret that such a genius was about to fall to the dark side.

She shook her head and said to Link, "I'm afraid Kanorse will not be able to make it back to the Ice Peak Fortress. Even if he did, they might not be able to dispel the dark forces in his body. Am I right?"

This was the truth. Everyone fell silent, and Kanorse's face sank.

Previously, he was clueless about the powers of the Divine Gear and thus had the confidence to go against it. However, his confidence and beliefs as the strongest Warrior in the World of Firuman were now slowly collapsing.

Kanorse turned to look at Link as he spoke with a hoarse voice, "Magician, kill me. Don't let me become a monster."

Everyone stared at Link, waiting for him to come to a decision.

The main goal of their mission was to rescue Kanorse. However, they had now reached their limits. Unless a god descended on the world, there was no way to change Kanorse's tragic fate. The only way they could prevent the situation from getting worse was to kill him on the spot.

Link stayed silent. Unless he was really left with no choice, he would never give up on Kanorse.

However, how should he dispel the dark forces corroding his body?

He set his sights on the 200 Omni Points he had left. In order to suppress the demonization process of the Divine Gear, the spells of mortals would be useless. The only spells that would work would be Legendary spells.

Two hundred Omni Points would be enough to purchase a Legendary spell. Link clearly remembered one that could be used to dispel the dark forces while he was

playing the game. The only problem would be his Mana Points. He was now left with 1500 Mana Points and would not be able to cast the spell even if he purchased it.

What should he do?

Link opened the list of spells that he could purchase in his mind and found the Legendary spell card he was looking for, glowing radiantly in many different colors.

Forbidden Mystery. Great Purification

Level-14 Legendary Spell

Cost: 140 Omni Points

Mana Cost: 11000

Effect: Dispels all dark spells and forces within a 3000-foot radius.

The insane Mana Cost of this spell made Link shiver in fear. His Maximum Mana now was merely at 8100 points. He would still be 3000 Mana Points short even if he was at his best.

It was impossible for him to activate this spell.

What should he do?

"Ah!! I cannot hold on anymore!" Kanorse once again bellowed. The effect of the Sacred Silver was truly short-lived. It merely lasted for a few minutes before the deadly poison of the Dark Serpent started raging in Kanorse's body once again.

His eyes became blood-red and dark runes could be seen circling within them. The claws on his hand were also growing at a speed visible to the naked eye.

"Kill me! Kill me now!" Kanorse looked at Link, as though pleading him to end his life.

Clang! Felina brandished her Sacred Silver dagger and walked towards Kanorse before placing it right under his chin. She then looked at Link and said, "Magician, we are running out of time!"

Link was still hesitating.

The strongest human Warrior, Two Saints of Mankind, Legendary Swordsman, the Pillar of the World of Light—all the accolades that Kanorse would be conferred with in the future flashed across his mind.

"Link!" Felina urged. She was about to lose her grasp over Kanorse.

"Master!" the scouts shouted.

"Kill me! Stop hesitating! Quick!" Kanorse spoke in a muffled voice. He could feel his consciousness being consumed by a giant snake.

Link gave a long sigh and walked up to Kanorse before kneeling down on one knee. He then placed a hand on Kanorse's chest and whispered, "Warrior, hold on, I will dispel it for you."

Although this was a curse from a Divine Gear, its power would definitely have been suppressed by the laws of the World of Firuman. If Link were to use a Legendary spell, it should be enough to dispel this wretched dark force.

Link decisively bought the Level-14 support Legendary spell.

"Link, you are not joking, right?" Felina asked in disbelief.

While Link was the strongest combat Magician in the human race, he was still a mortal. How could he say that he can dispel the power of a Divine Gear?

Link then gave a reassuring smile and said, "Don't forget that we are in the Soul Realm. As long as you believe in your actions, anything can happen!"

If they were in the Physical Realm, he would never be able to cast this Legendary spell with his current strength. However, they were in the Soul Realm. As long as he had enough conviction, he would be able to do whatever he wanted.

Many thoughts flashed through Link's mind.

Will I be able to cast it? Yes, I can! My soul is comparable to that of a sacred soul! Link thought.

There is no free lunch in the world. There is bound to be massive side effects using the power of the soul to cast a Legendary spell. The question is if it is worth it.

Link asked himself an extremely tough question. The essence of this question was simply, For what reason do humans live?

Many faces flashed through Link's mind. Celine, Eliard, Rylai, Herrera, Jacker, Lucy and many others he had met on his journey.

May the World of Firuman never descend into darkness. May the people who love me see no despair! This was the answer Link found.

He could never support the entire World of Firuman with his own power. The world was made up of many different creatures and races. Fighting this war alone would never work.

Link made this choice not merely based on his emotions, but also his wisdom.

After Link went through this introspection process, his conviction became exceptionally firm.

The next moment, a multi-colored brilliance appeared on his body. Following which, this brilliance extended through his entire body, almost making him look sacred.

A few moments later, this brilliance descended onto Kanorse, who stopped his mindless struggle almost instantaneously.

Kanorse opened his mouth and took a deep breath. His eyes were wide open, though out of focus. He felt as though he had seen the light. Countless blessings of light were raining down upon him from the void of this world.

In an instant, his agitated heart found respite.

The multi-colored brilliance continued expanding with Link as the focal point. It rushed past Felina's body and through the scouts.

In this brilliance, the thick mist was completely dispelled. The Nightmare Beast that was hiding in a corner disintegrated into a cloud of green smoke. His scream of pain soon followed.

An extremely strong energy wave seemed to surge through the Soul Realm and expanded in all directions. The creatures of darkness within the Dark Forest were frantically escaping the area.



Even if I have to give everything I've got, I will continue on the path I have chosen!

Link felt immense pressure and pain on his soul but chose to ignore them all and continued on his Great Purification spell without hesitation.

Amongst this endless brilliance, Felina's eyes widened and looked at Link in disbelief. She understood that this power had exceeded the limits of a mere mortal.

Annie stared at the pained expression on Link's face and wept while trying to stifle her cries.

The remaining scouts were already kneeling on the ground from the impact of this spell. They felt as though they had seen the incarnation of God.

...

Dark Forest, Physical Realm.

Aymons had arrived at Auselia's side. He was casting the Realm Conversion spell at the moment when he suddenly halted his actions. The spell he was casting was interrupted as well.

"What happened?" Auselia asked.

Aymons shook his head. "Nothing. I felt slightly flustered for a moment. It must have been my old age."

He then continued casting the spell.

Five seconds later, the surrounding world seemed to be robbed of its vibrant colors. Auselia, Bruttan and the group of 30 ghouls were all transported to the Soul Realm.

Aymons did not enter the Soul Realm together with them. His voice rang through the atmosphere, "Your Highness. You will be able to stay in the Soul Realm for three hours. Three hours later, you will be automatically transported back to the Physical Realm. If you wish to return before that time, please call my name."

# Chapter 238

## You've All Been Very Naughty

The glorious aura filled the sky for five seconds. After that, the brilliant light slowly dissipated, leaving only Link's figure.

Link knelt on the ground. On the interface, rows and rows of notifications popped up. Once he took a glance at them, he realized that they were all reminders from the gaming system.

Player begins to burn his soul. Emergency protection started.

Clearing all reserve Omni Points... Begin consuming 500 reserve Omni Points.

All Omni Points consumed.

Elemental Affinity Bloodline transformation suspended, converted into 350 Omni Points. Begin consuming Omni Points.

All Omni Points consumed.

Player currently has 200 Omni Points. Begin consuming Omni Points.

All Omni Points consumed.

Purification spell completed. All reserve energy from gaming system consumed.

After reading this series of information, Link felt the emptiness in his body which was bereft with Mana and heaved a sigh of relief. Fortunately, he'd only consumed the reserve energy, and his soul did not suffer any damage. Link regarded this as incredible luck.

"Link, are you alright?" asked Annie with a worried tone.

Link turned around and saw the concern in Annie's face which warmed his heart.

"I'm fine," he said. "But I can't cast any high-level spells for a while."

In fact, he still had about 500 points of Mana, but considering the strength of their enemies at the time, this amount of Mana was basically useless.

Felina walked over to him too, and she looked quite alarmed.

"Was that a Legendary-level spell?" she asked.

"Perhaps, I'm not sure," answered Link. "It was a spell that I created when I was learning magic." It was something that he just couldn't explain, so he just had lie about it.

"I'm sure it was," insisted Felina. "I've seen Legendary spells, so I would know. I never expected a mortal to be capable of such force!"

The scouts nodded eagerly. They knew nothing about Legendary spells, but from what they saw—how the darkness of the realm of the soul was dispelled, how the sky was now cleared and how the white fog that blanketed everything was now gone—if that wasn't Legendary, then what was?

Link couldn't say anything in response. He merely stretched out his hand and shrugged.

"Oh..." Karnose's voice alarmed everyone. It seemed that he was waking up.

The purification spell had been successful. The signs of dark magic and the dark forces had been purged from his body, and the claws on his hands had vanished. Even the blood in his eyes was now gone.

But the powerful divine source of the dark energy was evident when they saw that although it was expelled from Karnose's body, it was not destroyed. It merely turned into a pool of black liquid on the ground near the Warrior.

This black liquid would even move. Parts of it even took the form of a snake and would move threateningly as if it was ready to attack anyone at any time.

Naturally, everyone stayed away from this black pool of liquid. Felina stretched out a hand to Karnose to help him up, but Karnose didn't seem to need any such assistance. He leaped up to his feet with surprising agility, almost as if he'd never been injured.

Then, he turned to Link and with his fist on his chest, gave Link a formal Warrior's bow.

"Master Magician," he said, "thank you for saving me. From now on, for as long as I live, you may summon me any time you wish, and I will fight for you!"

Just moments before, he was desperately hopeless. But at the very last moment, he saw the infinite brilliance of the glory of light. It was as if the heavens extended a giant hand down to him and plucked him out of the dark abyss.

He could only repay such kindness with his own life.

But Link merely responded with a wave of his hand and a cynical smile.

"I'm afraid you spoke too early," he said. "We're still trapped in the Black Forest, and the Dark Serpent is still following us close behind."

Karnose's face turned grave and serious. He looked around and only saw the Assassins' daggers and the Red Dragon Warrior's dragon claws. He couldn't find a sword anywhere.

"If only I had a sword to fight with," he remarked.

"What?" exclaimed Felina, glancing at the Warrior up and down. "Are you strong enough to fight now?"

Karnose nodded.

"The dark forces may have controlled my body," he said, "but it had also repaired my injuries. Now that I'm purged of all the dark forces and all my injuries healed, why can't I fight? Although my Battle Aura isn't at its strongest yet, I'm sure I can kill a few ghouls now."

Link's eyes suddenly lit up. Karnose was a Level-8 Warrior. With his strength, they could probably get out of the Black Forest now.

Moreover, he did have a sword with him—the Storm Lord's sword. He was just about to grab its hilt and hand it to Karnose when a voice interrupted him.

"Stop!" said the sword's voice. "He's not worthy of me yet!"

Can't you let him wield you for a while? Link asked. Only until we escape the Black Forest. Or are you afraid of the Dark Serpent?

"Me?" retorted the sword. "Afraid of that snake?"

Then what's wrong with letting him wield you for a while? Link asked.

"You don't understand," replied the sword. "It's not that I'm afraid of fighting against the Dark Serpent, but I'm not suitable for it. I'm too weak now, but the Dark Serpent is infinitely strong. The moment I come in contact with it, I'll be smashed to bits."

Link thought this argument made sense. He dismissed the idea of lending the Storm Lord's sword to Karnose, but there was another idea in his mind.

Link still had 500 points of Mana left. It wasn't enough for him to fight himself, but it was sufficient for him to use Higgs Field to conjure up a sword using the Khorium in his storage pendant.

With this idea in mind, Link took out the materials from his storage pendant and turned to Karnose.

"I'll make you a sword," he said. "Tell me the kind of sword you're used to. Wait, we can talk while we walk."

Karnose saw the Khorium in Link's hand, and his eyes lit up. Khorium had excellent resistance to strong forces. Even without any magic fixed to the sword, one that was made with this material would be a good weapon on its own.

"I like a single-handed sword..." he began, "Well, one that looks like this sword on your waist would be good enough, but it would be nice if it was slightly longer... Yes, exactly this size!"

As the Warrior described his ideal sword, Link was using the Higgs Field to create one with Khorium right before his eyes.

"I'd like the hilt changed a bit, yes... just like that," Karnose continued. "I'd like a sharp axe at the back... and the blade should be thicker, and it should be serrated here... That's good, yes. Just like that! Excellent!"

Ten minutes later, Karnose held the sword in his hand and tried swinging it in the air.

He smiled with satisfaction.

"Judging solely by how it feels in my hand," he told Link, "this sword that you hurriedly created in a few minutes is the best sword I've ever used!"

Felina glanced at him.

"Link is the most famous enchantment master in the continent," she told him. "Such a simple creation would, of course, be an easy task for him."

As she spoke, she showed the defensive bracelet that Link made to the Warrior.

"Look," she said. "I've got one of his creations too. A friend had brought it back to me from the mortal realm as a gift."

Link didn't expect his reputation in the art of enchantment to spread so far that it reached the Dragon Valley and even became Felina's treasured possession. It was indeed an honor.

"We don't have much time," said Link, smiling. "If we are lucky enough to escape from this place and return to the Norton Kingdom, I'll create a magic sword for you, one that's much better than this."

"You will?" asked Karnose, his eyes shining, although he suddenly smiled cynically moments afterwards. "But I'm afraid I don't have enough gold coins to pay you..."

"I'll persuade King Leon to reward you," said Link, still smiling. "so don't you worry."

There was no incident along the journey as they walked on.

With the powerful Warrior Karnose here among them, the scouts were relieved. Even Felina was visibly more relaxed. They continued their journey for more than half an hour until Link suddenly felt something awry. He looked up into the sky and raised his eyebrows.

"Something's not right," he said. "They're chasing after us... and they're very fast!"

There were no more signs of the Dark Serpent in the sky, but that heavy black aura kept extending towards them constantly.

After a few moments of careful observation, Link finally understood what was going on.

"Auselia has entered the Soul Realm," said Link. "We can't stay here. Let's get out immediately!"

Everyone nodded silently.

Link took out the scroll and activated it with some Mana. After a while, the world transformed from the grays and blacks to more colorful tones. The chilly wind and the white snow once again reappeared.

Link cast the Level-2 Cheetah's Agility on himself.

"Quickly! Move at your full speed!" he shouted. "We've reached halfway, another 150 miles and we're safe!"

As long as they entered the Norton Kingdom army's fortress, Auselia would then be forced to stop. Her god-level device might be able to kill thousands, but there was one huge flaw—the natural world rejected this device, so the more energy it consumed, the more unstable it became. Once it reached its limits and had insufficient energy, it would just pop out of existence.

When that happened, there wouldn't be much that the Dark Elves could do except cry about it.

Everyone knew this was the critical moment, so they ran wildly and as fast as their feet could take them. Although Link had cast the Cheetah's Agility spell on himself, his speed was still much inferior to the scouts' and even slower compared to Felina and Karnose's speed. The two Warriors each lifted one of his arms and carried him through the forest, pushing him forward at incredible speed.

They must've been moving at half a mile per minute.

They ran this way for a full hour before Karnose and Felina stopped almost at the same time.

"She's caught up with us," said Felina, looking back at the dense forest behind them. She sighed, thinking that it must be time for them to fight to the death.

"Ha! I guess it's time for my sword to drink some blood!" said Karnose, not feeling a trace of fear. He'd seen and experienced so much by now that he understood that as a Warrior, his aim was not to live long, but to die with honor and dignity!

Honestly speaking, Karnose was quite a decent man, after all. His face was firm and not bad looking, and his whole body was shrouded in a strong masculine aura. With this look and that spirit, any maiden in the kingdom would gladly throw themselves into his arms.

Another talented genius with handsome looks, thought Link, slightly bitterly. What a cruel world.

Link remembered that he didn't have much Mana left so he would be quite useless in combat.

"They've got many ghouls on their side," said Link. "I'll stand by and try to pin them down for you."

He then spent 60 points of his Mana to cast a single target Traceless spell and found a place to hide. Although they seemed to have fallen into a desperate situation, he would never give up easily.

No one knew what would happen in the future. But if they persisted, even for a second longer, there was always a chance that things could take a turn for the better. Many miracles had occurred in this world, and they always happened at the very last second!

Annie cleaned her dagger solemnly and applied the anti-freeze grease on her crossbow. She gently blew off some dust from the crossbow and smiled. This was probably going to be her last battle. To die with Link, Karnose and Felina would be the highest honor as a fighter!

All the other scouts were in silence. They began to check their weapons as well, and they started to find a good spot to hide, getting ready to ambush the enemies.

They were proud to have persisted to this stage as they fought against a god-level device. There was nothing to regret now.

After about a minute or so, a figure shrouded in black flames appeared. It was the guardian of the Dark Serpent, Auselia.



She had 50 ghouls behind her, along with the Level-7 demon Warrior, Bruttan.

Their force was immensely superior to Link's group. Both Felina and Karnose went slightly pale, but they looked at each other and Karnose simply discarded all his worries and laughed.

"Let's see who kills the most ghouls!" he shouted.

"Hahaha! You're no match of mine!" said Felina, playing along with it to give herself more courage.

Auselia noticed Karnose then.

"Ah, look at you," she said with that sickly-sweet tone of hers. "Karnose, Link... you've all been very naughty. How could you break your promises to me?"

# Chapter 239

## What is This Thing?

You would never understand how terrifying Auselia was if you had never faced her in a battle!

When you were going up against her, the immense pressure from the Divine Gear would be enough to make anyone kneel on the ground in awe. Even powerful beings like Felina and Kanorse felt that their hearts were especially heavy upon seeing her, as though a huge stone was crushing their willpower.

"Go, my servants, teach them a lesson!" She hollered.

Auselia did not go onto the frontlines. Instead, she stood cautiously at the back while ordering the ghouls to charge forward.

The ghouls were extremely fast, especially when they were charging forward. They could cover a distance of 250 to 300 feet in one second. Ordinary people would only be able to see a phantom of their true body.

In the past, the ghouls had made use of this advantage to kill many human soldiers. However, things would not go so smoothly this time around.

By the time the fastest ghoul reached the halfway mark, an air ripple had already appeared beside them. This air ripple was six feet wide and 15 feet long, appearing out of nowhere.

Boom! Boom! The ghouls were completely unprepared for this attack. The fastest ghoul lost his balance and flew out of his charging trajectory.

He then proceeded to knock at least five other ghouls out of their trajectory as well.

Following which, the sounds of arrows being fired from the Sacred Silver crossbows rang through the atmosphere. The scouts had already cooperated with Link for a few times and had developed some sort of chemistry with his battle tempo. They would seize the perfect opportunity to fire a burst of arrows, bringing down the ghouls who

were knocked into the air by Link's attack.

The moment these ghouls fell to the ground, they were already seriously injured and had lost their speed.

"Kill them all!"

Kanorse's ability to capture the perfect opportunity to strike was also extremely useful in this situation. Half a second before the first ghoul touched the ground, he had already started charging into the heart of the battlefield. By the time the ghoul landed and was struggling to get back up on its feet, Kanorse was already brandishing his sword in front of them.

With a clean swing of the blade, the ghoul's head was mercilessly severed.

The ghouls had an extremely strong life force. However, that was under the premise that their entire body was more or less intact. Without their heads, the main organ for their cognition and coordination, they were immediately rendered useless.

Kanorse's body was like a whirlwind. He spun his body as he dodged the attacks while accurately severing the heads of the ghouls that came his way.

His movements were extremely coherent. The dodging and attacking moves smoothly interlinked with one another, forming a graceful war dance.

His Battle Aura skills were near perfect as well. Before he swung his sword, there was no hint of Battle Aura on it. It stayed this way even after he swung it. It was only until the moment when the sword made contact with his opponent that he unleashed his Battle Aura, erupting his energy instantaneously.

This Warrior knew how to accurately manipulate his energy while conserving it at the same time!

Within three seconds, Kanorse swung his sword five times. There were no fancy sword stances or skills involved, but it was exceptionally effective. He beheaded one ghoul with every swing of his sword and executed all the ghouls that were thrown his way.

"Tsk tsk. Kanorse, you truly are a perfect Warrior." Auselia's eyes shined upon looking at the way Kanorse fought. She then turned to Bruttan and said, "Dear Bruttan, please stop his naughty tantrum before he causes any more trouble."

Bruttan nodded as his demonic Battle Aura erupted. His body was immediately cloaked in a layer of dark flame, and the two nine-foot-long swords in his hands became two pillars of pure dark energy.

"Die, Warrior!" This giant launched an attack towards Kanorse.

However, when he reached the halfway mark, a crimson figure blocked his way. It was the Red Dragon Warrior Felina.

She was originally more than five foot seven in height, already an astounding height when compared to a female human. Furthermore, she packed a strong physique to begin with. When she stepped in front of Bruttan, she had somehow raised her height to a massive ten feet five and enveloped herself in a crimson Red Dragon Battle Aura. She charged forward as she flung her dragon claws in rage, leaving strikes of fiery red shadows in its wake.

"Demon, your opponent is me!" After increasing in size, Felina's voice also became exceptionally bright and loud.

Bruttan was taken aback and immediately blocked the attack with his sword.

Clang! Two loud, metallic collisions could be heard as the conflicting Battle Aura clashed into one another. Bruttan and Felina then both took a step back. They seemed to be on equal footing.

Auselia stared as her eyes grew even brighter, "Another powerful Warrior. It seems like it's harvest day."

At this moment, it seemed like they reached a stalemate.

Kanorse had completely sealed off the ghouls while Link constantly interfered with the battles using his Vector Field spells. The scouts, on the other hand, were picking up the loose ends while Bruttan was caught up in a tough fight with Felina.

The two Level-7 Warriors seemed to have endless Battle Aura. They constantly released their Battle Aura without any thoughts on conservation. Many times, a ghoul crept closer to give some assistance to Bruttan. However, before he could render any help, he was heavily injured and blown away by the explosion of Battle Aura, some of them even had their body parts severed from the terrifying shockwaves.

After a few tries, even the ghouls gave up trying to intervene in this absurd battle.

On the other side, Kanorse was killing the ghouls with extreme efficiency.

Previously, when he was fighting against the ghouls, no one dared to provoke him and ran away as soon as they saw him on the battlefield. However, these ghouls were now rushing straight towards him.

Naturally, he would crush them under his overwhelming power.

The ghouls were beheaded in a systematic manner as though they were just sent into a slaughterhouse. Their heads rolled about lifelessly on the floor while their headless bodies still twitched and flailed about on the ground, reeling in from the shock of getting beheaded. This scene was a testament to the power of the strongest Warrior of the human race.

Within one minute, Kanorse had beheaded 15 ghouls. That was an average of one ghoul every four seconds.

This was an astounding result, and all the scouts around him stared at this scene in awe. They had already depleted all their arrows and were now guarding Kanorse's back with the Sacred Silver dagger in hand.

Kanorse, on the other hand, knew that this was not purely due to his strength. He knew that the reason he could kill these ghouls with such ease had a lot to do with the elusive magical force field that would appear from time to time.

While these forcefields seemed inconspicuous, it would often be cast at the most appropriate time, affecting the ghoul's sense of balance in the air. It could even be said that the ghouls were often sent flying right into his blade.

The situation seemed extremely optimistic. However, Link, who was currently hiding in the shadows only felt despair and anxiety. His gaze was fixed upon Auselia, who had not made a move up till now. He was thinking of countermeasures in his mind.

However, he had almost exhausted all his options. Link was not a god and was close to his limits.

Is this the end? Link frowned tightly.

However, he suddenly heard the rustling of leaves in the distance. He then paid closer attention, and after listening for a moment, a smile emerged on his face. Vance that old bastard... To think that he would do this without first discussing it with me. I will have a good talk with him after I get back.

Since a powerful aide was coming, the only thing he had to do now was to stall time.

Auselia had also realized the reason for this stalemate.

She sighed, "This is not good. My dear servants will be killed if this carries on. Dear Link, it seems like I have to personally discipline you."

As she said these words, she turned her body to face a tree at the side of the battlefield, chuckling, "Are you going to come out yourself, or do I have to personally drag you out?"

Link's Traceless spell had completely no effect on Auselia, the wielder of the Divine Gear. However, he most certainly would not surrender. He turned his body around and hid behind another tree.

"One small sapling will not be enough to defend against my baby."

Auselia smiled once again as her figure vanished from her location instantaneously. The next moment, she had already appeared at the edge of the tree, flinging her whip menacingly. She then set her gaze in Link's direction before lashing out an attack with full force.

There was nowhere to hide from the attack of a Divine Gear!

Clang! A figure suddenly appeared and blocked the Dark Serpent's attack. It was Kanorse. He had rushed back in the most crucial time and defended Link against Auselia's assault.

However, he had also paid the price for his action.

The Khorium sword in his hand was extremely sturdy. However, it was still material from the mortal world. After blocking this attack, a series of spider web-like cracks appeared on the sword. It seemed like it would shatter anytime soon.

Kanorse stared at his sword in shock and quickly turned to look at Auselia, focusing

his gaze on her. While putting up a guarding position, he said, "Sir, please leave, I will block her!"

"Block me? What qualifications do you have?" Auselia laughed as she lashed out another attack.

Kanorse lifted his sword to block the attack.

With a crisp metallic snap, the Khorium sword was immediately shattered into fragments. The whip then continued on its trajectory with full power, landing right on Kanorse's body.

Kanorse immediately vomited a mouthful of blood before his body jerked violently. He then collapsed weakly to the ground. Just one attack from the Divine Gear brought him to the brink of death.

"Dear Kanorse, you are too annoying; I have to punish you slightly."

Auselia smiled as she lashed her whip. With this action, the tip of the whip transformed into the head of a snake. The snake then opened its mouth and revealed its poisonous fangs, glistening dangerously in the dark. It then charged straight towards Kanorse.

"Demon, you still have to get past me!" With a loud bellow, Felina freed herself from Bruttan's grip and charged straight towards Auselia from behind her back.

Swish! Auselia immediately retracted her whip. This speed was extremely fast.

Felina was taken aback by this reaction speed and immediately raised her dragon claws to protect herself.

Clang! The dragon claws shattered into pieces followed by Felina's scream of pain. Her hands were drenched in blood and trembled involuntarily from the impact.

Felina lost all her combat abilities in one single strike.

Bruttan arrived soon after. He swung the giant sword in his hand and with a muffled bang, the sword landed right on Felina's head. Felina then vomited blood from the heavy impact before losing consciousness.

The scouts were horrified at this scene and instinctively decided to retreat and defend their stronghold. However, while the ghouls were unable to deal with Kanorse, they could totally deal with the Level-4 scouts. In a matter of seconds, the scouts were all tragically defeated by the ghouls, and they lay on the ground weakly. No one knew if they were still alive after the brutal assault. Annie was the only one lucky enough to rush to Link's side before the ghouls got to her.

Upon seeing this scene, Link helplessly sighed and said, "Let them go and I will go back with you."

"Oh? Give me a reason to." Auselia stared at Link with interest.

Link the calmly said, "The Dark Serpent can make me your servant. However, it would also remove any shred of intelligence and rationality from my brain. If you let them go, I will swear in the name of the Lady of Darkness to serve the Dark Elves."

"Oh? That is a wonderful idea." Auselia was clearly intrigued.

If a Magician were to become her mindless servant, he would truly be quite useless. However, if the other party voluntarily agreed to serve her, the Dark Elves would gain a Magician with almost infinite potential. To get a Magician of this caliber in exchange for the lives of a few Warriors was indeed a good bargain.

Kanorse roared, "No, Master! You cannot do this!"

Annie had the most extreme reaction. She took out the dagger and was prepared to drive it right into her heart. Link would no longer have any reservations if all of them were dead.

It would definitely be a catastrophe if Link were to become a Magician for the Dark Elves. Compared to this, her life meant nothing.

However, when she was only halfway through her suicidal act, Auselia prevented her from doing so.

Auselia gently grabbed Annie's hand as she said, "My dear, you cannot die. If you die now, Link might not be willing to go with me anymore."

Annie stared at Link with a tear-stricken face as she shook her head.



Kanorse stared into the sky and slammed his fist onto the ground with all his remaining energy as he roared. His voice was filled with helplessness and pain.

However, Auselia was only concerned with Link. This Magician was a perfect specimen. If such a treasure could belong to the Dark Elves, it would be her greatest harvest.

"Swear it." Auselia stared at Link keenly.

"Let them go first!" Link's voice was calm, and his face showed no signs of fear. No one could guess what he was thinking.

After ten seconds, Auselia finally decided to agree to Link's conditions. As long as this Magician was willing to return with her to the Skeletal Fort, she would be satisfied. She then stared closely in case Link had other tricks up his sleeves, "Alright..."

Before she completed her sentence, a young girl wearing green battle armor with exquisite features appeared in the Dark Forest. A crisp voice emerged from her body, "Master discovered... Master Danger Rating: 5 Star. Commence rescue mission!"

"What is this? A magic puppet?" Auselia was taken aback.

# Chapter 240

## The Threat Has Been Eliminated

When Nana appeared, everyone except Link was stupefied.

What was happening? How did this delicate young woman come to the evil and sinister Black Forest?

Bruttan just waved his giant sword around and leered at Nana as if she was the most enticing thing he'd seen in a while.

"Hey! Look!" he said gruffly. "It's a pretty little doll! I can't wait to squash her to death!"

He then charged forward at Nana. His nearly 15-foot-tall body weighed more than a ton. Even his steps rumbled the bushes and trees around him.

Nana, on the other hand, was only slightly more than five feet tall. She was also slender and petite. She looked as if Bruttan could easily trample her to death without any effort at all.

The ghouls didn't even take any notice of Nana. They were waiting eagerly for Bruttan to finish her off.

Only Auselia sensed something out of the ordinary.

"Bruttan, be careful," she warned.

"Don't you worry..." said Bruttan with a grin.

Before he could finish his sentence, he suddenly heard a bang in the air. Soon, the young woman had vanished.

"Huh? Where did she go?" Bruttan's eyes widened. His expressions had changed. He finally felt that something was wrong.

Whoosh...

The leaves on the trees suddenly fluttered. Half a second later, Nana's body reappeared, and she almost caught up with Link now. Her sword's edge was on Auselia's forehead, but it was blocked by a layer of flowing black crystal.

It was the god-level device's protection.

Even so, Auselia was now frightened. She'd never expected the magic puppet to have such terrifying force. She had no time to respond to this attack at all, and if it wasn't for the Dark Serpent, she would surely have been pierced through her skull again.

That's impressive, Auselia thought. But it's still not good enough.

Auselia then pulled her whip back and struck it on Nana's body.

Bang!

Another air explosion, and right before the god-level device hit her body, Nana had once again disappeared, bringing Link, who was right beside Auselia, with her.

Half a second later, Nana and Link reappeared 300 feet away. Her hands were holding Link's head, and there was a magic force field around Link's body which protected Link's neck from breaking due to her sudden burst of speed.

"Master's life is safe," said Nana with that clear mechanical voice. "First part of mission completed. Nana will get Master out of the Black Forest."

Link was surprised. Is the magic puppet going to save him alone? That would be bad. He couldn't just leave Karnose, Felina, Annie and the rest of the scouts here to die!

"Go save them!" he immediately said. "This is my order!"

Nana was about to take Link away and run, but when she heard Link's words, she instantly paused.

"Analyzing Master's authority..." she said. "Authority level one. Nana will execute Master's order."

Boom!

The wind whistled, and Nana's body disappeared from Link's side.

"Be careful of her!" Auselia shouted. Her voice had a tinge of panic in it, and she'd long discarded that flirtatious tone now. This is normal, though. No one could stay calm when they could have almost died seconds ago.

Half a second later, Bruttan suddenly wailed in pain. His whole body was thrown out, and one of his legs had been snapped cleanly off from his body. His black blood was dripping from the wound.

Even demons were living things as well, so the amputated leg undoubtedly caused Bruttan excruciating pain. Bruttan held on to the wound and screamed as loud as he could, no longer able to fight.

Nana stood at the spot where Bruttan was.

"Target number two has been mutilated," she said. "Threat eliminated."

"Go stop her!" shouted Auselia. At the same time, Auselia instinctively stepped backwards and began to retreat.

Even the ghouls knew fear. They clearly saw how fast the magic puppet was. She was so fast that one didn't have even time to even react. How were they supposed to fight her?

But it was Auselia's command, so they had no choice but to charge at Nana and surround her.

Boom!

Nana vanished again.

A second later, four of the ghouls suddenly felt a mysterious impact on their bodies. They reached their hands out and grabbed their necks and slowly fell to their knees. After a second, a line of blood appeared on their necks, and soon, the heads of all four ghouls slipped off of their shoulders.

Nana appeared outside the circle of ghouls.

"Go to hell!" shouted Auselia with both shock and fury. She charged towards Nana while striking her whip at her.

Boom!

Another air explosion and the whip once again struck empty air. Nana escaped Ausellia's attack by a close shave. Half a second later, three more ghouls stopped dead in their tracks, and soon their skulls all fell off of their shoulders too.

"Aaaah!" screamed Auselia, frantically charging at Nana. She wasn't slow at all, at a speed of 900 feet per second. For a living thing made of flesh and blood, this speed was horrifyingly fast.

But Nana was still twice as fast as her!

Auselia's god-level device whip could almost destroy anything in the physical world, but despite all her efforts, she just couldn't hit the magic puppet.

Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam!

Four more ghouls were killed mysteriously. Every time Nana dodged Auselia's attack, she would the attack the ghouls at high speed. After a while, only ten ghouls were left in the forest.

These ten ghouls stared at each other. Although they were still obeying Auselia's command and was surrounding Nana, their steps had turned slow, their actions were hesitant, and their minds were in a state of panic.

This was a hopeless battle! They were no match for the magic puppet!

If this went on, the only thing that would happen would be them getting killed by this horrifying magic puppet. Perhaps even their great leader might not survive!

Auselia finally realized that she would never be able to catch up to this demon puppet. She was no fool; she knew it was time to change her tactics. She then changed her direction and charged towards Karnose who lay on the ground.

With a hostage, she might be able to force the magic puppet to confront her.

However, this idea was only good in theory, because reality turned out to be crueler than Auselia thought.

When she was 50 feet away from Karnose, she suddenly noticed a burst of explosive

gas flow around her. Soon, Karnose had vanished from the ground. Half a second later, Karnose reappeared about 300 feet away.

The next one to vanish was Felina, then Annie followed, and finally the two surviving scouts. Not only that, but while the magic puppet saved those people, she had also killed all ghouls at the same time.

Auselia was always a step behind Nana. Her speed was just too slow for this magic puppet!

Now that the hostage strategy had failed completely, Auselia exploded in rage. Never had she ever been tricked and teased this way. She was the guardian of the god-level device! She would not be insulted this way!

She then shrieked with a voice that pierced through the air, and she pointed the whip in her hand to the sky.

"I won't let any of you escape!" she shouted. "You'll all stay here! Swallowing Storm!"

Swallowing Storm

Dark Magic Divine Attack

Effects: The Dark Serpent will open its mouth and begin to swallow the souls of all creatures with ten miles.

(Note: Once this spell is launched, the repulsive effects from the physical realm on the Dark Serpent will double, and the Dark Serpent's powers will be reduced by 80%.)

This was a mighty Battle Art, and it was an attack that no one could evade.

"She's lost her mind!" exclaimed Link when he realized what Auselia was doing. His face had turned pale.

There was such a move in the game as well, although it worked at the range of only 700 feet. The real version affected an enormous range of ten miles! With this degree of power, it seemed that there was nowhere to hide!

Besides, once this kind of attack was launched, the device in Auselia's hands would be virtually destroyed. If she wanted to restore its power again, then she had to summon

the dark god's power by sacrificing more souls, and even then, she might not succeed.

This was because the realm of Firuman had marked the characteristics of this device, and so would reject it the moment it tried to cross the dimensional barrier.

The long whip in Auselia's hands became erect, and it stood straight towards the sky, shrouded in violent black flames. These black flames surged into the sky and condensed instantly to form the ghostly figure of a giant serpent. The serpent was about 300 feet long, and it opened up its wide jaws, looking as if it were about to engulf the earth.

Link immediately felt a strange pulling force, as if something was trying to tear himself out of his own body.

He turned to look at Karnose and the others. A faint shadow appeared around each of them, probably their souls. It seemed that the Dark Serpent would soon suck their souls out of their bodies!

This was the power of a god-level device, and no mortal could resist it! Link took out the Dimensional Scroll and directed his mana into it.

"Let's go!" he shouted.

Then, the entire world turned gray again, and everyone had reached the Soul Realm.

But to their horror, Link found that it was all in vain because even in the Soul Realm, there was a Dark Serpent so humongous that it covered the whole sky. Its jaws were also wide open, and it was swallowing all souls around him.

The same calamity was happening in this realm. That showed the sheer scale of a god-level device's destruction!

All realms were attacked at the same time, and there was nowhere to run and nowhere to hide!

In the physical realm, Nana stopped and didn't follow the others into another realm.

"Target is using unlimited power," she said. "Threat level, six stars. Begin search for weaknesses... No weakness found... Begin inquiries into historical records of battle strategy... Strategy acquired... Begin execution."

After an explosion in the air, Nana's body vanished. She then reappeared near Auselia. The sword in her hand glowed with a blue electric spark, especially at the tip of the sword where the spark was blindingly bright.

Stab!

Nana pierced through Auselia's eyebrows.

The black flame flowed to Auselia's eyebrows, blocking Nana's attack.

But Nana ignored it and stabbed at the same position on Auselia's head. Then she repeated it for the third time, fourth time, and fifth time. Her movements were lightning fast as usual, stabbing Auselia more than a hundred times a second.

Two seconds later, something strange happened.

The black flame on Auselia's forehead became extremely thin as if it could be broken through soon.

Nana kept at it and continued to stab through Auselia's forehead with increasing frequency.

Auselia finally felt the vibrations on her forehead. It felt as if the god-level device would soon fail to block the magic puppet's attacks. The defensive shield around Auselia's forehead was about to be shattered.

"This is impossible!" Auselia exclaimed.

She dared not take any more risks. She looked at Nana and suddenly decided to terminate the divine attack of the Dark Serpent and used her whip to strike the magic puppet in front of her.

Bang!

Nana responded quickly. After the last stab of her sword, she quickly launched her body from the spot and escaped.

Crack!

The shield on Auselia's body was finally shattered by Nana's sword. Her forehead was



now pierced through, and she collapsed to the ground.

Bang!

There was another loud crash. A large tree in the forest was broken in half by the impact of Nana's body. On her back, there was a huge whip scar, and around it, a crack began to spread across her body.

She didn't completely dodge Auselia's counterattack, it seemed. With just the slightest contact with the god-level device, her body had almost crumbled to dust.

She fell to the ground, and the clear, pure eyes of hers looked straight up to the sky.

"Mission completed," she said, her clear voice had turned hoarse. "The threat has been eliminated... Nana's body has broken down... Begin backing up information... Prepar—"

The crack in Nana's body expanded, and soon afterwards, Nana's whole body crumbled to the ground, leaving only a pile of metal fragments.

# Chapter 241

## The Divine Gear Is Finally Defeated

The moment Auselia canceled the Divine Skill, the giant snake in the Soul Realm disappeared immediately.

Link detected the changes in the situation and brought everyone back to the Physical Realm.

He happened to see the badly-beaten Nana lying at the spot where he landed. He then saw Auselia lying on the ground around 150 feet away with a penetrative wound right through her skull.

Strangely, there was no black crystal-like brilliance around Auselia this time around. The black aura that permanently shrouded her body previously had also disappeared. The wound on her forehead did not seem to be regenerating as well. She lay lifelessly on the ground and seemed to have died for good.

The Dark Serpent which she had always kept close to her had disappeared as well.

Felina had also woken up. Upon seeing this scene, she weakly said, "There is a legend in the dragon clan that each Divine Gear possess a spirit that will choose its own master. If it happens to find its current master unsuitable, it will abandon them without any hesitation."

Kanorse then said, "You are saying that the Divine Gear had lost faith in her after she was defeated by a magic puppet?"

It seemed to be the only explanation.

Link then walked towards Nana's remains. The Divine Gear truly had fearsome power. Nana's body was completely fragmented, and the only body part still intact was her head. Even this part did not escape completely unscathed. There were many cracks on the head as the pair of clear eyes stared back lifelessly at Link.

"She saved us." Annie walked up with a pained expression on her face.

Link felt regret and gratefulness in his heart as he put away these remains into his dimensional pendant. He then turned to his remaining teammates and said, "It seems like we are safe for now. However, we cannot stay here for long. Let's leave."

Everyone was heavily injured and supported each other along the way. Link was also left with not many Mana Points. He merely cast a Level-4 Traceless spell to cover up their presence before they slowly trudged towards the South.

There were no accidents along the way. When the group finally met a scout from MI3 in the forest a day later, everyone heaved a sigh of relief.

A message then appeared in Link's field of vision.

Step 4 of Skeletal Fort Mission Escape: Completed

Reward 1: 200 Omni Points (Given 60 days later)

Reward 2: Level-7 Glyph of Soul (Given 60 days later)

This was extremely good news to Link, apart from the fact that he had to wait 60 days before his reward would arrive.

The scouts escorted him along the way, and the group emerged from the Dark Forest a day later. A huge war fortress greeted them the moment they walked out of the lush overgrowth.

They were reaching the Ice Peak Fortress.

As Link watched the drawbridge slowly being lowered at the entrance, his heart was filled with the euphoria of escaping from that situation alive.

As he turned to look at Kanorse, Kanorse felt his gaze upon him and returned the glance with a smile. He then laughed, "Magician, you still owe me a sword."

Link smiled before saying, "You will have to first tell the King to settle your payment. I can offer to craft a tailored sword for you, but the price of it would definitely be well above 10000 gold coins."

Kanorse then smiled bitterly and said, "That's really steep... How about I give my life in exchange for the sword?"

"I'll welcome that any day." Link smiled.

Both of them then laughed heartily.

Felina, who was standing beside them also turned around and said, "Master Link, come to the Dragon Valley when you have the time. The issue with the Divine Gear is not yet settled. We need your input."

Link thought for a moment before replying, "Make it a month later. I will need some time to rest after returning to the South."

He was also thinking about repairing Nana. This magic puppet was way too powerful. It would be a waste not to repair it.

Felina nodded in understanding. She had been pushed to the brink of death several times throughout this mission to the Skeletal Fort. Even her Dragon Claw weapon was utterly destroyed. She was also completely exhausted from the mission and would not be able to return to her full power without a good amount of rest.

At that moment, the drawbridge was finally lowered. Behind the bridge, Duke Abel, some senior officers, as well as Magician Marco were already standing in wait. When they saw the returning group, they walked forward in big strides.

Duke Abel searched the returned group quickly, and his face softened the moment he saw his daughter. He then walked up to Link and bowed respectfully before saying, "Master, thank you for the hard work."

Link then returned a Magician's bow and replied, "I'm just doing my job. Sir Duke, I have many findings to report from this mission. I will write a detailed military report in due time."

"Please enter!" Duke Abel said excitedly. This was first-hand information in dealing with the Dark Elves. Furthermore, it would be coming from an extremely wise Magician. The reference value of this information would be huge!

As the group entered the fortress, the sight of the Dawn Swordsman caused cheers and smiles to break out from the crowd.

As for the Red Dragon Warrior, none of the human Warriors displayed any signs of disgust or fear when she walked past. They simply stared at her curiously. As long as

the Dawn Swordsman was still alive, it would not matter even if the sky was falling apart, much less the appearance of a peculiar Warrior.

As Link observed the scene, he could not help but be impressed by Kanorse's status in the military. He was simply reveled as the God of War. It was no wonder Duke Abel would insist on sending a rescue team even under such difficult circumstances.

As they reached the command hall in the center of the fortress, Link wasted no time and reported all his findings from this mission to the North in great detail. He described the incidents with the ghouls, the Skeletal Fort, the Divine Gear and its wielder, Auselia meticulously. He then introduced Felina to wrap up his entire report.

Link made an extremely objective report, including an estimate of every opponent's strength. When he was done with his speech, the entire command hall fell silent.

Everyone was shocked by two things.

Firstly, they had finally realized how the Dark Elves were able to create a lifeform as terrifying as the ghouls. To think that they would have harnessed the help of a Divine Gear! This was terrifying enough! Secondly, they were equally surprised that Magician Link was able to rescue Kanorse from the hands of Auselia, the wielder of the Divine Gear. They not only escaped her relentless pursuit but also defeated her using the help of Link's magic puppet.

This was equivalent to a mortal attaining victory in a challenge against the gods. If not for the fact that Link was standing right in front of them, no one would believe it!

From this perspective, the Divine Gear would not be that terrifying. After all, it had already been defeated.

After a while, Duke Abel said, "Master, according to what you said, the Divine Gear's location is now unknown. What do you think is the most possible thing that happened?"

Although the person standing in front of him was not even 20 years old, Duke Abel adopted an extremely respectful tone, almost being too humble. This was because Link's battle achievements were simply too outstanding to ignore.

Link had been thinking about this along the way and had his rough predictions. He said, "I feel that the Divine Gear's disappearance would only be temporary. The threat

is still at large. It will probably choose the second wielder after a while, and after this painful lesson, the second wielder will be someone wiser and more experienced. It would be terrifying to go up against such a Dark Elf. The Dark Forest is already not safe. I suggest to give up on the Ice Peak Fortress and retreat to Orida Fortress in the South.

One of the Mid-Level Officer was dissatisfied with Link's suggestion. From a Warrior's point of view, destroying the Divine Gear was the only way to completely eradicate the threat. "But this would not resolve the root of the problem; we should destroy—"

Before he could complete his sentence, Duke Abel shot him a stern glance before bellowing, "Silence until Master is finished!"

The Officer's face paled, and he immediately swallowed his words.

Link then continued, "I need everyone to recognize two facts. Firstly, it is impossible to destroy a Divine Gear. Secondly, it is not possible for the Divine Gear to stay in this world forever. It is depleting its energy every second and minute it exists, even as we speak."

As he reached this point, he looked across the hall and made sure that his words were taken seriously. He then continued, "The kingdom has operated the iron-walled line of defense with Orida Fortress as the strongholds for 300 years. It is extremely strong and sturdy. Based on my observations, we need to hold on for at most a year before the Divine Gear would be expelled from Firuman. The advantage the Dark Elves have will then automatically disintegrate into nothingness. I feel that this strategy will be the safest in the current circumstances."

Everyone in the hall fell into deep thought.

Link made it extremely clear that his strategy was indeed one that was the safest at the moment. No one would dare to claim total victory over a Divine Gear. As long as one made the slightest mistake, the entire Norton Kingdom might fall into the terror of the abyss.

A voice broke the silence. It was Kanorse. He stood up and said, "I have personally witnessed the power of the Divine Gear. Hence, I agree with Master Link's strategy. The Ice Peak Fortress is a temporary Fortress. The anti-magic properties of the castle walls and the detection range of the surveillance eyes are miles away from those that

we have at the Orida Fortress. It will be difficult to hold our defense in this area."

Annie then followed up, "I feel that retreating is the best option as well."

Everyone in the hall broke out in fits of discussion. Ten minutes later, Duke Abel knocked his hand lightly on the table to halt the discussion and said, "I will consider this carefully. We have 10000 soldiers in the Ice Peak Fortress. It is impossible to organize a retreat immediately. We will need to arrange this in waves. Furthermore, the final decision lies with the king."

Although he merely said that he would consider this option, Duke Abel was already completely convinced. He had no confidence in facing against the Divine Gear.

At this point, the military report meeting was adjourned, and Link followed Magician Marco to the Mage Tower after bidding his goodbyes.

On the way, Magician Marco said, "Master, we have carefully studied the ghouls. The Sacred Silver that you have brought seemed extremely effective. However, I feel that there are still rooms for improvement."

Link nodded his head and said, "I am not an expert in alchemy, but I will be staying here for another two days or so before making a trip to East Cove Higher Magic Academy. We can discuss how to deal with these wretched beings in this time."

The Dark Serpent possessed a Soul Devouring Divine spell. The army would not be safe even if they were to retreat to the Orida Fortress. He had to discuss a strategy to deal with this spell with the Master Magicians of the East Cove Higher Magic Academy.

Marco was elated and replied, "That would be perfect."

...

Two days earlier, north of the Dark Forest.

Half an hour after Link left, a white-haired, white-eyed old man clad in a black robe arrived at the battlefield.

He was Magician Aymons.

Looking at Auselia's body, he sighed and said, "You are a great disappointment to the

Dark Lady. The Divine Gear is tied closely to the fate of our race. It is not something that you use just to vent your anger. Please, be at ease."

He then squatted down and gently closed Auselia's eyes, which were wide open. Aymons then stood up and spoke to the surrounding woods, "Come out Dark Serpent."

With the sound of rustling leaves, a huge snake appeared from the overgrowth.

Aymons stretched out his hand. The giant snake then bumped into Aymons' arm before turning into a whip. Aymons then held this whip as he walked slowly into the depths of the forest. He then added, "This time around, I will definitely find you a better candidate. What do you think about my disciple Lawndale?"

Sssss. The whip first nodded before shaking its head.

Aymons then sighed, "He is indeed the best candidate. However, once he becomes the wielder of the Divine Gear, his lifespan would be shortened to only half a year. That would be a waste. Let me think... how about Muddafi?"

The whip shook its head once again.

"Muddafi won't do as well... This is difficult. Why not let me pick some volunteers, and you can choose one yourself?"

Sssss. The whip nodded its head lightly in agreement.



# Chapter 242

## The Emerald Circle

At the Icy Peak Fortress.

Two days flew by, and with Link's help, the Battle Mages in the Norton army were able to make great progress in coming up with countermeasures against the ghouls. One of them was the invention of a new crossbow.

In the courtyard of the fortress, Link, the Magician Marco, Annie and a few other scouts were experimenting with this new weapon. A number of quick-moving targets were set in front of them, and these targets moved back and forth at a speed close to 300 feet per second as a scout stood about 150 feet away. The scout held the crossbow in his hand and just pulled the trigger in the general direction of the moving target without actually trying to aim precisely at it.

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh!

Arrow after arrow shot towards the moving target out from the crossbow at high frequency and speed, almost at about five arrows per second. The arrows didn't always move in a straight line, though. Some of them moved in an arc-shaped trajectory, some in S-shaped paths, yet all of them hit squarely onto the moving target without fail.

Five seconds later, the crossbows were then out of arrows. The scout slammed his hand hard onto the main body of the crossbow, which prompted a metal box to jerk out from it. The scout then added new Sacred Silver arrows into this box and pressed it back into place until there was a click sound. Then, the scout once again raised the crossbow and aimed it at the target. The whole process of replacing new arrows took no more than two seconds.

The trigger was pressed once more, and a shower of arrows rained down towards the moving target. Not one arrow missed.

Soon, the arrows were emptied again, but the scout didn't stop shooting. He refilled the arrows for the third time, then the fourth, then the fifth—until finally, when he

refilled the arrows for the twentieth time, the crossbow was finally trained to its limits, and the strings broke in a discorded twang.

The moving target stopped at the same time. By now, it was pierced through by so many arrows that it looked like a porcupine.

Another scout rushed up towards the target to check it.

"489 arrows hit the target," he reported after a few minutes. "And 309 arrows hit the runes."

"That's 97% of all 500 arrows!" exclaimed Marco proudly. "We managed to hit a high-speed moving target at that high a rate, and 60% of them hit the critical points on the target. This is near perfection!"

This newly modified crossbow was almost entirely based on Link's ideas, so he was quite pleased and relieved with the results achieved. The scouts around him were excited by this outcome as well. To them, this new weapon could mean the difference between life and death on the battlefields.

"If this weapon gets adopted by the army on a large-scale," said Annie, "there would be no reason for us to fear the ghouls! We'd only need five people in a troop to use this weapon to make a huge difference!"

But Link was still far from satisfied. He thought this weapon still had a lot of room for improvements. If only he had more time, he'd come up with a way to use fire elemental spells to modify the crossbows into something akin to a machine gun.

But that wasn't the most practical idea. The cost of developing such a weapon would be too high to be a common weapon used in the army. This crossbow might not be the most ideal weapon, but it did strike a balance between efficiency and cost.

If it were to be produced large-scale, one of these crossbows would cost about ten gold coins while a Sacred Silver arrow would cost about 1.5 gold coins each, totaling at about four gold coins per box of arrows. King Leon might have to burn a hole in his treasury to arm all the MI3 scouts with one crossbow, but it was still a bearable cost and one that would be worth it ultimately since it meant the survival of the kingdom.

"It's time I head back south," said Link.

"I'll walk you to the gates," said Annie as she approached Link.

Link nodded, then the two walked together towards the stable in the fortress. Annie remained silent along the way until they reached a hidden spot near the stables. Then, she stopped abruptly and turned to look at Link.

"The god-level device can swallow thousands and thousands of souls in one swoop," she whispered. "Do we have any hope for victory, Link?"

She raised her head and looked up at Link, her face fraught with worry.

Link fell into silence for a while. The Dark Serpent had a wide range of attacks at about ten miles—that's as powerful as a nuclear weapon. With this weapon alone, the outcome of a war might be completely reversed, and the fate of humanity would be decided.

There was no way for the Norton Kingdom to win without first eliminating the threat of this weapon.

"This is indeed a menacing problem," said Link. "Once I return to the South, I will report this to the king and all the Master Magicians in the kingdom so we might come up with a solution."

"But we are ultimately mere mortals," said Annie, her voice still hushed and fearful. "Can we ever fight against the power of divine gods?"

Link could understand her anxiety, so he patted her shoulders gently and smiled.

"Have you forgotten that we've defeated the god-level device once?" he asked. "Don't worry, once I return to the South, I'll build a much stronger magic puppet."

Annie seemed to gain strength from Link's smile, and the vivacity returned to her face instantly.

"When will you come back to the North?" she asked with anticipation.

"I'll be here when I am needed," he replied.

"Good!" exclaimed Annie. "I'll be waiting for you."

Link then turned around and headed towards the stable where a few Griffins were kept. The magical beast was renowned for its remarkable endurance and speed, so it was the ideal transport to get him back to the South quickly and safely.

"Goodbye, Link," said Annie wistfully.

Link waved his hand and walked into the stable.

"That girl likes you." Link looked around in search of the source of the voice. It turned out to be Felina.

The Dragon Warrior had been recuperating in the fortress for two days, so she was virtually healed. She was leaning on the stable door with her hands folded in front of her chest, staring at Link with a smile on her face. Looking at her now, Link realized that she could remove the armor scales on her body. Apart from her extraordinary height, Felina now looked indistinguishable from any human being, even though her eyes were silvery and were emitting a faint glow as well.

If Link were to be candidly honest, he would say that Felina looked quite attractive. She had a beautiful figure even though she was extremely tall. Her body was well-proportioned, and her curves were alluring, not to mention her legs which were amazingly long and slender. Overall, she looked like a picture of vigorous health.

Link gave Felina a look and said nothing in response to her remark. He knew that Annie liked him, but he also understood that he must be cautious with the way he responded to her. Annie was a good friend of his, the last thing he wanted to do was hurt her feelings.

"Have you been standing here all along, waiting for me?" he asked, trying to change the subject.

"Yeah," admitted Felina. "No other human in this fortress is worth waiting around for anyway."

"Is there anything you wanted to tell me?" asked Link.

"I heard you're going back to the South," said Felina, "I'll give you a ride back, we'll discuss matters on the way."

"You'll give me a ride?" asked Link, confused.

"Of course; come with me." Felina then climbed up onto the roof of the stables, and Link followed closely behind.

Once they were both on the roof, Felina's body suddenly glowed in a red light. At first, it was dim, but soon it burst into a flame, and her body rapidly grew and expanded until she transformed into a red dragon almost 30 feet long. The Griffins in the stables were spooked by her sudden change and flew away in fear. Even the stableman in charge of the Griffins was so shocked he almost pissed his pants.

Felina shook her head gently and lowered her body to Link.

"Get up," she told him.

Fortunately, Link had seen such a sight before in the game, so he wasn't so perturbed by Felina's transformation.

In the game, the players who had acquired the Dragon Warriors' co-operation could occasionally ride on the dragons when they needed it. Most of the Dragon Warriors who were willing to give humans a ride were the younger ones who were more open-minded and didn't regard such a favor as shameful or insulting to their dignity.

Link then climbed up and sat on the back of Felina's neck, his legs gripping tightly to her body to stabilize himself. Once he was settled down, Felina took to the sky immediately and headed to the South.

"Nothing ever surprises you Magicians, huh?" teased Felina with a laugh. "I thought my transformation would've elicited some reaction from you, yet you didn't even bat an eye!"

"Well," replied Link, "dragons aren't foreign to us Magicians. We've always been reading about you in the textbooks. But anyway, why didn't you transform and fly away in the Black Forest? You'd move much faster this way!"

Felina grinned.

"There was a shadowy bird patrolling the Black Forest skies," she said. "I'd be a fool to fly there. Besides, there was that crazy woman chasing after us as well. I'd move faster if I flew, but I still wouldn't be faster than her."

"Well, you've got a point there," said Link. "The Black Forest really was a dangerous

place."

"One question," said Felina, "how are you planning to fight against the Dark Serpent?"

"I'll go back to my magic academy and discuss the matter with the Master Magicians there," answered Link.

"You mean the East Cove Magic Academy?" asked Felina.

"Yes," said Link. "But I'll also be asking the court Magicians for their input, and the Magicians from the Southern Magician Alliance as well."

To Link's surprise, Felina laughed at his answer.

"I'm afraid you'll be disappointed," she said. "As far as I know, the human Magicians have a superficial understanding of magic, and your history of learning magic is only about 2000 years old. The magic you've learned was all derived from what the High Elves, the dragons, and the Yabba race taught you. I really don't think you'll come up with any solution by consulting with human Magicians."

What Felina said was all true. Link had read the historical chronicles, where it was recorded that the present human race were the descendants of the Herde people from 3000 years ago. In the first thousand years of their history, they were merely savage barbarians, until two thousand years ago when there was a devastating catastrophe in the Firuman continent known as the "Mana Cataclysm." Magic knowledge and skills began to flow from one civilization to the other due to the shared fate that had befallen all races which forced them to work together in order to survive.

Even now, although the humans had achieved many astonishing feats in magic, they still lagged far behind the others in terms of their fundamental understanding of magic.

Strictly speaking, the Dark Elves were also considered to be an ancient race, but they had undergone too many changes and disasters; a lot of their traditions had disappeared. But they were still much stronger than the humans.

"I'll just try my best," said Link. "If it doesn't work out, then I'll find another way."

It was all Link could say.

"That's admirable of you," said Felina. "Who knows? Maybe you'll find some inspiration from the pile of historical records you humans keep!"

Felina then paused and flew in silence for a while before she began speaking again.

"You know," she said, "there is an organization comprising of tens of thousands of high-level Magicians from the magical races called the Emerald Circle. The members of this circle are at Level-4 or higher, and more than 500 of them are Master Magicians. If you can't find any countermeasures to fight against the Dark Elves in the Norton Kingdom, you should try and seek help from the Emerald Circle."

Link was dumbstruck for a while. He didn't expect to reach a point where he could get in touch with such a high-level group of Magicians as the Emerald Circle so quickly.

In the game, when the war between the Realm of Light and the Dark Army had reached its peak, the Emerald Circle was the main force that fought against the Dark Army. Link himself was a member of this prestigious circle when he reached the Legendary Pinnacle stage and was fighting against Nozama. His position in the Emerald Circle at the time was second only to its leader, Eliard.

"Hey, are you still listening?!" asked Felina.

Link was jolted back to the present.

"Yes," he replied. "Thank you for the tip. Do you know how I can get in touch with the members of the Emerald Circle?"

"Go find the Lady Fortuna," answered Felina. "She's a member of the circle herself. I'm sure she'd be delighted to guide you. You know, she thinks very highly of you. I've never seen her praise anyone this much before. She must've gone crazy."

"Got it," said Link. "Thank you, Felina."

The red dragon then flew faster and had traveled about 250 miles in under an hour. She landed near the Girvent Forest to let Link down.

"We'll part ways here," she said. "Remember, I'll meet you at your estate in a month and take you to the Dragon Valley. The Queen has taken an interest in you."

"Alright, I understand," said Link. "Farewell, then."

Link then waved goodbye at Felina on the ground as she took off. The dragon circled above him in the sky for a while then turned and left. Link also turned around and proceeded to walk along the King's Lane and headed towards the East Cove Magic Academy.

He didn't summon the Wind Fenrir for fear of causing alarm to anyone who might encounter him. On his way, a carriage rode past him, so he paid the coachman two silver coins so he'd let him hitch the ride at the back of the carriage where the other servant was sitting. He then had a relatively pleasant ride for the rest of the journey.

There were two merchants in the carriage, and Link could hear their conversation from where he sat. At first, they were only discussing matters concerning their businesses, but as the journey continued, one of them suddenly said something that shocked Link.

"Did you hear?" said the merchant. "The Magician Wavier in the South has gone insane! I heard he killed his tutor and more than ten other Magicians from his magic academy and even used black magic in Opal City which killed hundreds of people there! He's now escaped without a trace!"

The other merchant hissed, completely taken aback by the news.

"You're not kidding me, are you?" he said. "Where did you hear this from?"

The merchant had asked the exact questions that were on Link's mind.



# Chapter 243

## A Stunning Beauty

In the carriage, the merchant started flaunting his knowledge with pride.

"Hey, did you know? I just came from the South. Geez, that place is really in a mess. The Delonga Kingdom and the Southmoon Kingdom are in the middle of a fierce war, while the Doska Kingdom is filled with members of the Syndicate. The only safe places left are the Leo Kingdom and the Golle Kingdom. To think that such misfortune would befall the Leo Kingdom! How worrisome! My merchant group had to hire 30 mercenaries and also plan our return trip together with other groups before we dared to leave the area."

"Don't say things that I already know. I just want to know about Wavier," another merchant urged.

Link also paid extra attention to this piece of information.

The merchant then said, "Alright. Don't rush me. This is what I've heard. It was rumored that Wavier had rented an apartment in the city and was secretly experimenting with dark magic. However, he was soon discovered by his mentor. Following which, they got into a heated argument, and you know how capable Wavier is in combat. His mentor was killed right on the spot together with the accompanying Magicians. This happened in the crowded downtown area and implicated hundreds of innocent people as well. In essence, this is an extremely serious case. I've heard that King Leo is already preparing to punish the Magician Alliance severely."

Another merchant then nodded in agreement and said, "The Magicians from the Alliance are way too outrageous and arrogant. Weren't there demons in the city just a while ago? What did the Magicians do? They merely said that accidental injuries were inevitable and compensated the victims with their filthy gold coins. This is really infuriating!"

"Alright, let's stop talking. The Easy Cove Higher Magic Academy is just in front. These Magicians have all the means to eavesdrop on our conversation. Let's not let them hear us."

"If it were up to me, I feel that Magicians should not even exist in this world. They are all monsters! God knows what they do in secret! They might even be scheming to destroy the world for all we know," another merchant muttered under his breath before falling silent.

Upon hearing these words, Link sighed. This was the image of Magicians in the eyes of the ordinary citizen. They respected Magicians but at the same time, also feared them and treated them with suspicion and wariness.

Naturally, these were just the prejudices of the ignorant. There were still many wise and insightful people in the World of Firuman that recognized the value of Magicians. Hence, Link was not that surprised or even disgusted. He was, however, shocked at the fall of Wavier.

In the game, Wavier was the most brilliant Magician in the South. However, he gradually lost his shine and intellect until he finally became a nameless, ordinary Magician.

Even when the world's Mana concentration increased by leaps and bounds in the later versions of the game, he still only managed to become a Level-9 Magician. This carried on despite many of his peers being able to attain the Legendary rank. He was never able to achieve that breakthrough.

Link had met him a few times. His impression of Wavier was that he was an honest, decent and extremely hardworking person. In the late game, he even became obstinate and was unwilling to accept any new forms of magic or thinking.

He also had an extremely significant feature in the early-mid game, which was complete respect and adherence towards his mentor.

Some players hence dubbed him as "the genius who never grew up."

However, to think that he would personally kill his mentor and even all the accompanying Magicians was horrific. From the information he heard, Wavier even disregarded the lives of innocent citizens in the downtown area. What happened?

An ominous foreboding rose in Link's heart. Is the tiger out of the cage and ready to step back into the forest?

There was no doubt that Wavier was a genius. When Link headed south to rescue

Celine previously, he had gotten a glimpse of Wavier's strength. Wavier was probably the only Magician in the alliance that made him feel slightly pressured.

If such a genius were to lose his shackles and unleash his insanity on the world, the level of destruction he would cause would be terrifying. This news made Link feel extremely uneasy.

At this moment, the coachman's voice rang, "Hey, young lad. We have reached the academy."

Link was drawn out from his thoughts and jumped out of the carriage before saying, "Thank you."

The coachman then gave a hearty smile and said, "Get going. Don't listen to the nonsense the two guys inside were saying. We have no clue about what is happening in the South. However, our own Magicians from the East Cove Higher Magic Academy are still fantastic. They would never do such immoral things. If you can enter the academy, please study hard."

He then waved goodbye to Link, and with a swing of his whip, the carriage started moving towards River Cove Town amidst the trotting sounds of hooves hitting the ground.

Link's mood was suddenly lifted.

He then turned and walked towards the academy. Since he was already here, there was no reason to conceal his identity any further. With a thought, his body was enveloped in a crimson glow. By the time this brilliance faded, he could be seen donning the Flame Controller's robe.

The gatekeeper Vincent saw him from a distance away and bowed from afar.

Link then nodded before walking into the East Cove Higher Magic Academy.

After stepping through the entrance, Link stopped in his tracks to admire the view of the academy.

From this angle, he could see that the ruins and destruction caused by Demon Tarviss had already been cleared. At the spot where the Heaven's Thorn once lay, a new Mage Tower was being built. The same went for all the other Mage Towers that were

destroyed during the catastrophe. All of them seemed to be getting an upgrade and looked more majestic than before.

The reconstruction speed seems fast. King Leon is exceptionally generous this time, Link thought in glee.

The East Cove Higher Magic Academy was akin to the magic hub of the Norton Kingdom. It was incidentally also the place where Link achieved his greatest accomplishments in magic till this date. King Leon naturally had to give something in return when Link had generously offered him the anti-magic soil on his territory. East Cove Higher Magic Academy hence benefited greatly from this deal.

Link felt excited and inspired by the positivity in the academy and walked forward with big, confident strides.

He was already a well-known figure in the academy. When he walked into the plaza, Magicians around the area would bow in respect and stay in that posture until he walked past them.

After a while, Link saw a familiar figure. Upon closer inspection, he realized that it was Dean Anthony's disciple, the poet Selasse. Link was just about to find the dean and shouted, "Hey, Selasse, wait for me."

Selasse was elated to see Link the moment he turned around and said, "It is an honor to see you. What is the aim of your visit today?"

Link's mission to the North was kept a secret. There were only a few people in the kingdom who knew about his actions. Selasse was only informed of his territory development plans which explained his question.

"I was free today and wanted to see the dean. Is he in the academy right now?"

"Ha, you have found the right person. I'll bring you there," Selasse warmly invited Link to follow him.

He led the way as Link followed behind. The two of them walked past the Mage Towers of the academy and finally stopped at Bryant's Inspiration Courtyard.

The courtyard felt slightly different from before. There were no Magician's Apprentices walking around, and there were even the Kingsguards stationed around

the area. From afar, one could see many fancy tents erected to shield the people inside from the glaring sunlight. There were also many handsome lads and beautiful ladies sitting under the tents while donning their glamorous costumes. Under the largest tent, Link could see King Leon, Dean Anthony, the Master Magicians as well as Herrera.

There was another person sitting beside King Leon. It was a young woman that looked around 20 years of age. She had a pair of amethyst colored eyes and light golden-brown locks. Her pointed ears paired perfectly with her features which made her absolutely stunning.

If one were to contrast her beauty with the human race, the average looking King Leon would be akin to a farmer that had been working in the fields his whole life. Dean Anthony then simply looked like an old geezer from the countryside while the young female Magicians sitting around her were completely overshadowed by her beauty. The contrast would be apparent to anyone.

The only person who still maintained her brilliance in the presence of this beauty was Herrera.

Selasse's eyes widened as he stared at the scene and said, "Oh, there are two moons in the sky tonight. One is clear and pristine, while the other is gentle and mellow. It must be God's blessing that I can witness such a beautiful sight."

Link fell speechless at Selasse's words and patted his shoulders to draw him back into reality. He then whispered, "That elven woman is a Royal High Elf. Didn't Prince Phillip just visit a while ago? Why are they here again?"

Link deliberately kept some information hidden. In fact, he recognized this High Elf. She was one of the four great beauties in-game, Princess Milda.

In the game, she was the goddess of the otakus, and her fan page had more than 50 million followers. After seeing her in real life, Link felt the game did not do her beauty justice due to the limitations of the graphics display.

Selasse was still slightly intoxicated as he replied, "That is the High Elf Princess Milda. As our ally, she has brought with her a team of Magicians to help us defend against the Silver Moon Alliance. Speaking of which, your action of saving Prince Phillip that time helped catalyze this as well."

Link was slightly stunned upon hearing this news, but this was quickly followed by

joy. He thought, History has really changed. The High Elf Magician team had arrived in advance in this timeline. This calls for a celebration!

He was just worried that they might not be able to deal with the assault of the Divine Gear. The arrival of the High Elves was truly a timely addition to their forces.

At that moment, the captain of the Kingsguard, Olaf saw Link and immediately turned towards the tent where all the important guests were held.

...

In the tent.

King Leon placed great emphasis on the help rendered by the High Elves. He had personally come to the East Cove Higher Magic Academy to receive the High Elves Magician team. He was feeling extremely enthusiastic and was passionately holding a welcome ceremony to celebrate their arrival.

There were people dancing and singing at the ceremony. It almost felt like a festival.

Milda seemed to be very satisfied, judging by the smile on her face. She would tell a few anecdotes about life on the Isle of Dawn to King Leon, Anthony and Herrera every so often. The atmosphere seemed harmonious.

However, there were still many High Elf Magicians behind her.

These Magicians had an arrogant and impatient look on their faces. From their perspective, the cultural performances of the human race were simply too coarse and vulgar for their liking. It was like poison to their ears and eyes!

They were merely trying to be courteous. If not, all of them would have left a long time ago.

"My lord, I believe it is almost time," Milda said as she gave a warm smile. She had already put on this facade for a long time. It was becoming unbearable.

King Leon, on the other hand, felt extremely elated. He had not felt so relaxed in a long time. However, after seeing the tired expression on Milda's face, he said, "Alright, I will have to trouble you in this period of time. Please feel free to tell us if you have any requests. The Kingdom will try our best to fulfill your needs."

"Thank you very much for your hospitality." Milda was extremely polite, following which, she asked, "Do you happen to know when Magician Link will return from the North? I have to thank him personally for the incident regarding my brother."

King Leon had a proud expression on his face when Link's name appeared. He said, "It won't be long. We have news coming from the North this afternoon that Master Link had already returned to Ice Peak Fortress."

As he spoke, he saw Olaf walking towards him.

"Your Majesty, Magician Link is here. Look, he is right there." Olaf pointed in Link's direction.

Everyone in the tent immediately turned their heads in that direction, especially the High Elf Magicians. Their movements were almost unanimous. Their eyes were all set on a figure clad in a crimson robe not far away from where they were sitting.

To the kingdom, Link had just returned from a highly secretive and important mission. He was bound to bring back valuable information that would aid them in the war. It was thus something that they would look forward to.

To the High Elves, Magician Link had become famous even in the Isle of Dawn. Prince Phillip rained praises about him when he returned to the Isle of Dawn, even calling him the genius of the Norton Kingdom. Furthermore, he was the Magician who slew Demon Tarviss using a Level-9 spell. Even the prophet had offered his compliments to this young guy.

The High Elves had prided themselves on their accomplishments in magic. In their eyes, the human race had always been inferior. How could they not be surprised when such a prominent figure suddenly appeared in the human race?

# Chapter 244

## Can't Do it in Three Years

"Ah, Master Link is already back? Please let him in!" King Leon was very happy.

He had received news from the North. Not only had Link found a way to fight against the ghouls, but he had also rescued Kanorse and defeated the one with the Divine Gear. This greatly lowered the pressure on the kingdom.

This was a never-seen-before accomplishment.

Now, the High Elves thought so highly of them, making King Leon feel much better.

To be honest, as the king of the humans, he was stressed when faced with the High Elves and their long history of advanced magic. Without taking other aspects into consideration, their queen had a Level-9 Master Magician. This was extraordinary power, and she had countless other Master Magicians as well.

Faced with such strength, King Leon had no confidence at all.

Now, a Magician like Link had appeared that could impress the High Elves. It was good, very good. Link was the nation's treasure.

Seeing Link come over, King Leon stood up from his seat. Dean Anthony and the other Master Magicians went to welcome him as well. Seeing this, Elf Princess Milda also followed out of politeness and stood beside the king. She studied the incoming Magician as she walked.

He had black hair, average features, and average height. If not for his Magician's robe, no one would be able to recognize him in a crowd. As he walked closer, Milda finally saw some characteristics. The man's Mana was quite strong, only a little weaker than Anthony's. His eyes were very black and very clear. At a glance, they looked like a child's, but at closer inspection, they also seemed deep.

After observing, Milda nodded subtly. She thought, He's quite talented, even if he were in the Isle of Dawn.



She then turned to look at the magic legion she had brought. This time, she had brought 50 Magicians. They were all young and under thirty years old. She brought them out to become more experienced.

Of these Magicians, the lowest was Level-4. She was the highest, at the peak of Level-7. She was only a hair away from Level-8. Other than her, there was a Magician at Level-7 and fifteen at Level-6. This group was much stronger than the entire Norton Kingdom put together, but it was just the tip of the iceberg for the High Elves.

Sensing the princess's gaze, one of the young Magicians looked eager for action. His name was Morrowson. He was the third son of the Rosshander familia. He was 27 years old, and he was a Level-7 Magician. He was one of the best Magicians of the younger generation.

Milda looked back and motioned to Morrowson to stay put with her eyes. The polite and sweet smile appeared on her face again.

The king had arrived beside Link. He intimately grasped Link's hand. Laughing, he said, "Master, you've really helped me greatly this time. Otherwise, the northern war situation would be troublesome. Come, come, sit beside me."

King Leon was too welcoming, and Link could only hold his hand and follow the king to the seat. Dean Anthony and the other Master Magicians who had been sitting there were all forced one seat to the side. Thankfully, Link's performance had convinced the other Magicians. Otherwise, this action would have created some enemies.

After sitting, King Leon introduced with a smile, "This is the eldest daughter of the Elf Queen, Princess Milda. She is also a powerful Magician."

Link nodded at Milda. "Your Highness."

Milda smiled and replied, "Thank you for saving my brother Phillip. He always speaks of you."

Link also smiled. "It is my duty. Prince Phillip has already thanked me and even gifted me a Prophet White Stone. Your Highness must not worry over this matter."

His response was very formulaic. It was most suitable for this situation.

"Your words are so direct." Milda covered her mouth and laughed. She was honestly

too pretty. Her smile was beautiful too, like thousands of flowers blooming at once.

Link realized that everyone around him was awestruck. Even Anthony had to turn away, affected by Milda's smile.

King Leon acted unnaturally as well. He smiled and said, "Dancers, musicians, don't just stand there. Start dancing and playing."

But before the music could begin, a voice suddenly said, "Your Majesty, I have a request."

King Leon turned around and saw a High Elf Magician in the tent nearby stand up. He bowed politely and said, "Your Majesty, I heard that Master Magician Link's spells are very unique and no one in the Norton Kingdom can surpass him. We are very curious. May we witness it?"

King Leon was taken aback. He turned and looked at Princess Milda.

Milda smiled sweetly. "Your Majesty, we High Elves are a tribe of magic-workers and thirst for spells. We were all in awe after hearing about Link."

King Leon was conflicted. He knew Link was powerful, but he was still too young. The elves seemed prepared. He said he wanted to witness Link's spells, but it was actually a challenge. If Leon could not sense the danger, he would fail as a king.

The High Elves took pride in their magic. Hearing that a genius had appeared in the Norton Kingdom, they were obviously upset and wished to fight.

They were allies, but deep down, there were still rivalries and conflicts.

Anthony also sensed the elves' ulterior motive. He chuckled and said, "Link has just returned from the North. The travel must have been hard. Why don't we do it another time?"

At the side, Herrera nodded as well. Smiling, she said in her smooth and gentle voice, "Master Link's spells are too dangerous. It is not suitable to demonstrate them at an event like today. What if he hurts someone? Your Majesty, I think Master Link has something important to discuss with you, don't you think?"

Hearing this, King Leon began to follow Herrera's flow. However, the High Elf was

adamant. He stood up and walked out while introducing himself.

"I am Morrowson from the Rosshander familia, a Level-7 Magician. I've heard many stories about Magician Link and am very curious. Anyway, this won't take much time."

With that, he took out a small Mithril ball. His wand glowed, and the ball hovered before him. It began to produce different complex images—birds, horses, flowers, and more.

Every image was realistic without even a sliver of a flaw.

That was not all. Multitasking, Morrowson demonstrated his transformation spells and spoke to the silent Link at the same time, "Mr. Link, I heard that your enchantments are very advanced. What do you think of my Higgs Force Field?"

Objectively, Morrowson was using it very well. Even Link was not at his level. He still had not spent enough time learning magic and never trained in these showy techniques.

With this, the enchantment master from the East Cove Magic Academy looked uncomfortable. Even Master Weissmuller, who specialized in enchantments, could not use transformation spells as easily as Morrowson.

This situation was different now. The opponent was very strong and showed that he was challenging the other. If Link didn't accept it, it was a blow to his ego. If he did, he would lose.

Awkward.

The enchantment masters of East Cove Magic Academy were all silent. Dean Anthony whispered to Link, "Just use something you're good at to deal with him. These small techniques aren't important."

But Link frowned. He did not like these meaningless spells. He could sense that the High Elf was doing this out of arrogance. However, after all those life-or-death experiences, Link had pride and restraint for his spells.

Once he cast a spell, he must get something in return, either money or a life. He did not like performing in front of everyone for the sake of it.

Seeing that he was not speaking, Princess Milda guessed that he did not dare to accept the challenge and was a bit disappointed. "I see. Your reputation was probably just exaggerated by the human race. I knew that humans couldn't have any official Magicians. They're all amateurs."

Of course, she only thought that. She couldn't say it out loud. Instead, she reprimanded, "Morrowson, what are you doing? Mr. Link just returned from the northern battlefield. Can't you let him rest? Step down. Demonstrations can come later."

Morrowson shrugged. "As you wish, Your Highness."

He put away his Mithril ball with disappointment and prepared to return to the High Elves' tent. The atmosphere was heavy, and the human Magicians were all embarrassed. King Leon felt humiliated as well and didn't know what to say.

"Wait." Link stood up.

Morrowson stopped and smiled. "Mr. Link, did you prepare a skill?"

Link's smile faded. He shook his head and said, "It's not a skill. It's just a small trick."

With that, he took out his wand. Mana rushed in. Half a second later, the air before him trembled. A round three-foot-wide spatial lens appeared. Then, Link took out a Mithril ball the size of a finger and flicked it towards the mirror. After the ball entered, the mirror began to distort. It folded and overlapped like a high dimensional space demonstration. It was indescribably complex.

It was maintained for three seconds before the mirror disappeared. Link reached out, and a black grain dropped into his hand. Flicking his hand, he activated the Magician's Hand. The black metal grain floated towards Morrowson.

"It's just a small trick, but I'm sure you wouldn't be able to do it even after three years."

With that, many humans involuntarily gasped. Link had spoken so arrogantly but if the High Elves could beat him, he would be so embarrassed.

However, the High Elf had a strange expression.

The moment the mirror appeared, Morrowson's expression changed and it was not

just him. The princess and the Magician legion in the distance all grew serious.

The reason was simple. Link had used spatial magic to compress the Mithril to one-hundredth of its original size. Spatial magic had always been the most difficult type of magic—not just for humans, but also for High Elves. There were only a few who could do it.

Not everyone with Mana talent could perform this magic. It required extremely high insight. In this regard, humans were not too far behind the High Elves.

Link's words were not polite, and Morrowson was discontent, but after this, he could not argue. He nodded and said, "Master Link's trick is very powerful but please take back what you said about three years!"

Then his expression darkened, and he stopped speaking. Holding the compressed Mithril ball, Morrowson stalked back to his seat.

He had embarrassed his race.

He would go learn spatial magic this instant!

## Chapter 245

# The Divine Skill is Impossible to Defend Against

Link was being polite when he mentioned that Romilson would take at least three years to learn a Spatial Magic spell. In fact, he should have mentioned that he would not master it in his lifetime.

There were, of course, Spatial Magicians amongst the High Elves in the game. However, they were all known by name, and the total number of Spatial Magicians amongst the High Elves never exceeded five at any point in time. Romilson was never part of this exclusive and powerful group.

Link had once run errands for Romilson while he was playing the game. Coincidentally, these missions were those where Romilson had tasked Link to collect materials required for Spatial Magic experiments. He was trying to master Spatial Magic with fervor.

However, after Link had worked hard to collect all the materials, Romilson's experiment eventually ended in failure, and he never managed to master Spatial Magic.

Link could still remember what Romilson said after his experiment failed, "Oh, God of Light, why would a thing as torturous as Spatial Magic exist in this world!"

Following which, he would burn all the magic books and materials he had painstakingly collected for his experiments.

Link was confident enough to say so because of this exact mission that he had taken.

After Link had spoken, not only did Romilson not retort, the High Elf Princess Milda also fell silent. The reason was simple. In the game, although Milda knew a few Spatial spells, that was only after she had attained the Legendary rank. Furthermore, she had only mastered the most basic of Spatial Magic and was far from achieving anything outstanding.

At that moment, she still had not mastered any form of Spatial Magic. In fact, she had

once tried to learn this torturous branch of magic but gave up after just half a year. She almost went through a mental breakdown during that period of time due to the difficulty of this magic.

However, Milda deeply regretted her actions back then. If she had persevered on the path, she might have been able to reclaim the dignity of their race in front of these humans. She would have stood up immediately and shouted, "Look at how arrogant you are. Isn't it just some little tricks? Anyone could cast those simple spells!"

But she could not. Her entire Magician team including herself were completely clueless about the workings of Spatial Magic.

"That is amazing. Sir Link has really opened our eyes to a new realm of magic." Milda smiled dryly while the rest of the High Elves followed suit. There was a hint of bitterness and disdain in their expressions.

This was a huge blow to the reputation of the High Elves. If this incident ever got out, they would definitely become the laughing stock of all the races in Firuman.

On the other hand, while King Leon was clueless about magic, he could tell from the High Elves' reaction that Link had completely overshadowed them. He then laughed heartily and said, "Master Link, Romilson is young. Don't get too worked up over this matter."

Following which, he then turned to Milda and said, "Milda, our Master Link is known for his bad temper. Please don't take offense. From my perspective, I don't think Romilson needs three years for this spell. One year would be more than enough just to learn one spell. Am I right?"

Milda was completely dumbfounded by King Leon's speech. After all, he had completely no knowledge about magic. She could only reply with an awkward and embarrassed smile.

Dean Anthony had a shocked expression on his face. As an established Magician, he could understand the difficulty of the little trick Link just performed. Why would the High Elves eat humble pie if not for the ridiculous difficulty of Link's performance?

Seeing King Leon's attempts at lightening the atmosphere, Anthony echoed, "Your Highness Milda, Master Link, and Romilson are both young lads. Isn't it normal for young people to learn and compete with one another? I say let bygones be bygones.

Your Majesty, it will be nightfall soon, shall we adjourn for the day?"

This was the exact sentence King Leon was waiting for. Now that the human race had defended their dignity in front of the High Elves, there was no need to embarrass them any further.

He nodded and said, "The dean is right. Milda, shall we end this celebration?"

"At your command," Milda said as she wished to leave this place immediately.

King Leon immediately waved his hand and commanded the musicians and dancers to leave. Everyone around the desk then stood up and prepared to leave the premises.

Link had more important things to take care off. The things that happened moments ago were insignificant compared to what he wanted to say. He merely performed a few tricks and defended the dignity of the human race. It would at most become an interesting anecdote in the near future. However, the war in the North was a more pressing issue altogether.

He then whispered into King Leon's ears, "Your Majesty, the issue about the Dark Divine Gear is pressing. Why don't we start discussing countermeasures in the Heaven's Thorn while the High Elves are present?"

King Leon immediately felt a shiver down his spine. He was well aware of the details of the military report Link gave in the North. Naturally, he was also knowledgeable of the dangers the Divine Gear posed. This issue was related to the fate of the Norton Kingdom.

He recollected his stern demeanor and relayed Link's message to Milda.

Milda naturally agreed. What happened previously was merely a small matter. When it came to serious matters, it would be important to put aside personal emotions. A Magician who was unable to accomplish this would be unfit for the upper echelons of the kingdom.

She nodded sternly and whispered to the attendant beside her. This attendant then immediately ran towards the High Elves' Magician team to relay the message.

On Link's side, he was also explaining the situation to Dean Anthony and the concerned individuals. Following which, an entire team made up of powerful



Magicians headed towards the Heaven's Thorn.

Although the construction of the Heaven's Thorn was not complete, the parliament hall in the tower could already be used. Upon reaching the long table, King Leon naturally sat at the head of the table, followed by Dean Anthony, who sat by his side and then Link. They were then followed by the respective Master Magicians of the academy and lastly, the high-ranking Magicians. There was a total of over sixty people in the hall.

Amongst them, those who were less than Level-5 in rank could only stand as they were not offered seats.

It was the same situation on the High Elves side. Milda was sitting beside the king followed by Romilson and then the high-ranking Magicians.

After everyone was seated, King Leon coughed slightly and said, "We will be discussing strategies to deal with the Divine Gear, the Dark Serpent. We will need powerful spells in response to the Divine Gear. As I am not well versed in the area of magic, Master Link will speak on my behalf."

The mention of the Dark Divine Gear sent shivers down the spines of the High Elf Magicians. All of them immediately put their contempt for the human race at the back of their minds and listened intently.

Link nodded and pointed his wand in the air. After a beam of light shot through the air, the appearance of the Dark Serpent emerged in the form of a hologram. It was a black whip in the shape of a snake.

"This is the Dark Serpent. It is extremely powerful. In order to summon it, the Dark Elves sacrificed at least 150000 Icefield Barbarian souls. In the North, I witnessed a fortress made entirely out of bones of the deceased. They term this the Skeletal Fortress. Upon entering the Soul Realm, I could see the captive souls of the Icefield Barbarians floating around the area."

While he was speaking, Link changed the display to show the appearance of the Skeletal Fort.

At this moment, everyone had a look of disgust and shock on their faces, especially the High Elves. They had lived a life of peace and decadence on the Isle of Dawn. They could never have imagined such cruelties existed in the world.

"150000 lives? How could the Dark Elves do such things?"

"The Spider Queen is an Evil God! She will definitely be defeated!"

"A fortress made out of bones. If not for the fact that I witnessed it with my own eyes, I would never have believed such evil existed!"

With a light thud, Link, placed another wand on the table. This wand exuded a dark presence and the Cat's Eye Stone at its tip had been delicately carved into the shape of a horrified human face.

Dean Anthony immediately recognized this Epic Dark Magic Wand. He shouted, "Century's Nightmare, the Soul Taker's Wand!"

Link continued, "This is the weapon of a Dark Magician that I defeated at the site. It is extremely powerful. An ordinary person will probably be bewitched the moment they come close to it. However, what I want to say is that the Divine Gear is a hundred times, or even a thousand times stronger than this. The wielder of the Divine Gear, Auselia, had once attempted to unleash the Soul-Devouring Divine Skill. From my observation, this Divine Skill has a range of 11 to 13 miles."

Everyone fell silent upon hearing this information. Everyone stared at the Dark Wand on the table and tried to imagine the power of the Divine Gear in their minds.

A Divine Skill that possessed a range of 13 miles was truly a catastrophe!

After a long while, King Leon spoke with a terrified expression, "I have no idea how to deal with this specifically. However, we need to have a countermeasure to this Divine Gera. If not, we will definitely lose this war."

Milda then looked at Link and said, "Since the Divine Gear is so powerful. May I ask then, how did Master Link escape?"

"I relied on a magic puppet that I had accidentally acquired." Link then tapped his wand lightly in the air again, and Nana's image appeared in the air. He then continued, "This magic puppet is extremely powerful and possessed a fast attacking speed. Making use of its sneak attack, we managed to kill the wielder of the Divine Gear, which allowed us to escape alive. However, the Divine Gear has a spirit of its own. The moment it realized that its host was killed, it hid its presence straight away. I was hence unable to bring it back with me."

Link deliberately left out Nana's origin in his account. It was a normal sight for a Magician to have his own magic puppet. Hence, no one questioned him further on this matter.

After listening to this account, Milda went into deep thought while all other Magicians fell silent.

Was it possible to defeat a Divine Skill using mere mortal techniques?

Even after bringing together the strongest Magicians in the Norton Kingdom, as well as a team of elite Magicians from the younger generation of the High Elves, no one had any ideas that could turn the situation around.

They responded with silence.

Anthony was the first one to speak, "I feel that I need to make a trip to the library."

The moment he said that Romilson sneered and said, "Dean, I don't think that hitting the books will give you an answer. The Dark Serpent has appeared a total of three times throughout history. Due to the effect of the Dimensional Rejection, it will change its form every time it enters the World of Firuman. Hence, we will be facing a brand new Dark Serpent. The previous methods will not work."

This demonstrated the in-depth knowledge the High Elves had about the history of this world. They had been around for more than 10000 years and had never lost connection with any of their culture and ancestors. They had detailed records of everything that ever happened in this world.

In this regard, the human race which had only been around for a short time and were constantly agonized by war and conflict could not even hold a candle to the High Elves.

Anthony merely moved his lips in disdain before falling silent after listening to Romilson's sarcastic words. While his tone was infuriating, it was the truth. Furthermore, it was not a time for personal emotional disputes.

After ten minutes, King Leon still heard no suggestions that could bring any changes to the current situation. Even Link fell silent. The boundaries of magic were limitless; he still had a long way to go before attaining the level of a god.

Lastly, King Leon frowned as he said, "We cannot delay this any further. Master Link,

are you sure that the Divine Skill can only be activated once?"

"I am sure."

Milda also added, "This dimension will automatically reject the power of the Divine Gear. Hence, it can only be activated once."

King Leon then stood up and said, "Well then, I will start preparing now. I need to make sure that the kingdom is still strong enough to defend itself against the Dark Elves even after the destruction of an entire troop."

Magicians had their own way of dealing with problems, and King Leon also had his own response to this issue. When magic could no longer provide an answer, he had to consider the number of sacrifices he needed to make.

This was truly a cruel and helpless choice.

If they could not find a way to deal with the Divine Skill, it meant that one of the main troops of the kingdom would definitely be destroyed by the Soul Devouring Divine Skill of the Dark Serpent. What King Leon had to do was then to ensure that he could swiftly organize a new line of defense after the catastrophe in place of the casualties, preventing the kingdom from being breached.

Milda also had a serious expression on her face as she said, "I have to make a trip back to the Isle of Dawn. I think I might find some useful answers there."

The High Elves and the Dark Elves were mortal enemies. The moment they engaged in conflict, they would not stop until one side was completely defeated, that was, to the point of eradicating their entire race. The Norton Kingdom was now a shield for the High Elves. If this shield was broken, the High Elves would also pay a heavy price of losing many of their comrades.

Hence, the High Elves would do their best to ensure the integrity of this shield.

This was what they needed to and had been doing for the past tens of thousands of years. The only thing that changed was the name and ownership of this shield accompanying the rise and fall of many kingdoms.

"I thank the High Elves for their help in this matter," King Leon spoke respectfully with a heavy heart.

It was not necessary to continue the meeting any further. Everyone stood up with a pained expression on their faces.

Annie then asked, "Link, what plans do you have?"

Link had already formulated a plan in his mind. He did not plan to keep it in and said, "My magic puppet was destroyed while it was attacking Auselia. I will try my best to repair it. Although the Divine Gear is invincible, it's wielder is not. Perhaps, my magic puppet can once again create a miracle."

Link did not witness the entire battle between Nana and Auselia. However, if she had already done it once, why not a second time?

This was Link's interpretation of the solution to deal with the Divine Gear. It might not be the most reliable way, but as long as there was a chance of success, it was worth trying.

# Chapter 246

## Spatial Magicians Are All Monsters

After the conference, Link politely rejected Anthony's invitation. He prepared to return directly to his territory and find Vance. He needed Vance's help if he wanted to repair Nana.

Coming out of the Heaven's Thorn, Link began thinking of how to repair Nana.

He had dealt with Nana before and was certain about this magic puppet's strength. She was extremely fast and had almost 700 years of battle experience. She reacted quickly and was exceedingly sensitive to enemies' weaknesses. Her body was strong; basic elemental magic was mostly ineffective on her. Bottom line, she was practically a perfect soldier.

Link thought for the entire way but could not think of any areas to fix. Vance had spent twenty years creating this magic puppet, and it definitely couldn't be underestimated.

That simplified things. Since he couldn't fix it, he would just strengthen it, pushing Nana's limits as far as he could.

She was fast, wasn't she? Then he'd make her even faster!

She couldn't turn at her max speed, right? Then he'd think of a way to make her turn!

She wasn't sturdy enough and was destroyed by the Divine Gear, right? Then he'd make her even stronger!

Following this train of thought, countless ideas immediately appeared in Link's mind. The magic knowledge he had learned recently popped up like bubbles. They combined, burst, and combined again, creating various crazy and unique ideas.

"Yes, I'll hurry back and recreate Nana!" Link was excited now. He sped up and went towards the stable of the East Cove Magic Academy.

Halfway there, a voice suddenly sounded behind him, "Mr. Link, wait for me."

The voice was crisp like marbles rolling on a plate. This unique and beautiful voice belonged to the Elf Princess Milda.

Link slowed down. He turned to see Milda jog over alone. Probably due to the running, her translucent cheeks were now pinkish. She was as beautiful as a painting.

"How may I help you?" Link was confused. He hadn't really interacted with the princess yet.

Milda reached Link's side. She exhaled deeply and adjusted her breathing. She quickly recovered her ladylike composure and smiled, saying, "I'm here because of the spatial magic spell you just used. The spell is very unique. From what I know, there are no books about spatial magic in the East Cove Magic Academy. Where did you get the knowledge?"

Link continued walking towards the horse stable. Rather than keeping it a secret, he admitted, "The academy doesn't have any, but I've been deducing a spatial thesis for a year. I've had some results recently. The spatial magic spell is one of them."

Milda followed Link. Hearing this, she was shocked. "So you created the spell yourself?"

In the field of magic, improving spells and acquiring super spell techniques was already very difficult. Creating spells was even harder. If he was able to create an obscure spatial magic spell, it was a bit frightening.

This meant he had a shocking amount of magical insight. This man had surpassed countless Magicians!

Milda was forced to admit that this young man truly had a special characteristic. "Can I see your thesis?" She was curious about the thesis Link was deducing.

"Now?" Link glanced at the stable in the near distance. "I'm preparing to return to my territory. Now might not be the time."

"Oh..." Milda glanced at the stable as well. She wanted to use her status as a princess to make Link stay here longer. However, she remembered that this wasn't the Isle of Dawn and Link wasn't her citizen. If she used her status but Link ignored her, she would be embarrassed.

Thinking more, Milda said, "Wait for half an hour, alright?"

"Fine." Link nodded. Half an hour was not long.

Milda lifted her skirt and jogged back. After around twenty minutes, she returned. There were two High Elf Magicians; one of them was Morrowson.

Running back and forth, Milda's face was even redder now and sweat beaded on her forehead. Panting, she said, "Let's go. I'm returning to the Isle of Dawn. I heard that there's a port on your territory, so I'll just go from there."

At the moment, she was so beautiful that Link had to lower his eyes. He nodded. "I'm honored."

The two High Elf Magicians, Milda, and Link arrived at the stable where Link found a large carriage. There was a small table inside. It was usually up against the wall and could be flipped down when needed.

After the four settled in, Milda flipped the table down and reached out her slender hands at Link. "Where's your thesis? Show me." Worried that Link would be unwilling, she added, "I won't read it for free. I heard from your dean that you want to repair your magic puppet. I have *The Heart of a Puppet* written by a Level-9 Master Magician. How about we trade?"

As she spoke, she pulled the book out. Link flipped through it and was captivated.

Earlier, he had read the magic puppet material Vance gave him when he had time and was mostly done with it all. There were only some details he needed to purify. This book before him explored an entirely different train of thought. He only looked at a few pages, but Link could already sense the author's unique intelligence.

"This is a very good book," Link praised. He took out the spatial thesis from his dimensional storage gear.

The thesis was no longer the few pages it once was. Now, it was at least one hundred sheets of intuitive breakthroughs, most of it containing Link's own symbols, markings, and various changes. It was extremely complicated, but it was Link's simplified version. If he wanted to write each deduction step in detail, it would probably be 300 pages.



Of course, Link would never do that. He had already written the critical steps. Those who could understand would naturally understand. Those who couldn't... probably had no talent for spatial magic to begin with.

After handing over the thesis, Link started focusing on The Heart of the Puppet. Milda opened the thesis and started reading with her two Magicians.

The carriage fell silent. The only sounds were the clacking of hooves and wheels.

After around half an hour, Link had completely immersed himself in the wisdom of The Heart of the Puppet. The three High Elves, however, had knitted brows and painful expressions. They seemed to be enduring the world's cruelest torture.

The Magician whose name Link didn't know had already given up. He started looking at the scenery outside the window. Compared to the obscure and incomprehensible thesis, the scenery was much more enjoyable. At least his head wouldn't burst.

Milda and Morrowson were still at it. Using the symbol index Link had made, they studied the thesis bit by bit.

It was pretty simple in the beginning. They felt comfortable, but this easiness only lasted around ten minutes. Ten minutes later, the content had entered a purely rational territory. What did that mean? It meant that it was logical, but many conclusions were completely opposite of the common knowledge that one received by perceiving the world. (See the Theory of Relativity.)

As Level-7 Magicians, Milda and Morrowson could understand purely rational theories. But there were so many changes and Mana equations—how could someone deduce this?

The logic in this was incomprehensible!

After struggling for half an hour, Milda gave up. As a Level-7 Magician, she could sense the deep wisdom in this thesis, but it made her head hurt. She felt like she would die if she kept reading.

She checked her progress; she'd only read a portion, around twenty pages. There was still a lot more left, but Milda did not have the courage to look.

Only Morrowson was still persevering. He had been humiliated by Link once and was

still upset over it.

He thought, It's just spatial magic, isn't it? The thesis is right here, and we're all Magicians. You can write a thesis; you're skilled. I can't but does that mean I can't read it?

With this supporting him, he read... one page more than Princess Milda.

That single page took him one hour before he could kind of understand it. Halfway through, the thesis had taken some kind of drug and suddenly became extremely obscure.

"Mr. Link, how did you deduce this Mana equation? I don't think it's right," Morrowson said, pointing at an equation.

Link did not reply. He was focused on the book in his hand.

"Mr. Link? Mr. Link?" Morrowson called.

"Ah, what's wrong?"

"I asked if there's a mistake here," Morrowson said, pointing at the equation. Beside him, Princess Milda glanced in curiosity. She hoped Morrowson had found a flaw so they wouldn't be completely defeated.

Link glanced at the equation and asked in confusion, "Where?"

How could it be wrong? If it was wrong, how could he use the inaccurate result and perform the spatial magic?

"Look here... here... the change is illogical. Doing this will cause turbulence in the Mana," Morrowson said decisively.

Link took another glance and pointed at the parameters. "You've underestimated them."

"Uh... oh!" Morrowson hit his forehead. It suddenly made sense and his face reddened. He had misunderstood the writing; it was totally embarrassing.

Link ignored him and went back to his book.

This made Morrowson feel slightly better. Gritting his teeth, he continued reading. After another half hour, it felt like his head was splitting. He was going to break down. Looking up, he saw that Link was still immersed in the magic puppet book.

He whispered to the princess, "Your Highness, the thesis is getting harder and harder. I can't finish it."

Milda also snuck a glance at Link. Seeing that he wasn't paying attention, she whispered, "Shh, don't say it aloud. It's embarrassing. You two, use the magic image and make a copy. I'll bring it back to the Isle of Dawn."

This thesis was valuable; that much was obvious. They just didn't have the talent to understand it.

"Okay." The two High Elves got to work on copying the thesis.

It was around 150 miles from the East Cove Magic Academy to the Scorched Ridge of the Ferde Wilderness. The carriage was quite fast as well. Even at a slow pace, it could travel thirty miles in one hour. After four hours, the Scorched Ridge was in the near distance.

Here, Link had finished *The Heart of the Puppet*. He sighed in satisfaction. "Such a good book. There are some flaws, but it doesn't affect the wisdom contained."

Milda's beautiful lilac eyes widened. "You finished it?"

"Mostly. There are some specifics that I must look into with detail when I get back."

Hearing this, the two High Elf Magicians stared at each other and then gaped at Link as if he were a strange beast.

*The Heart of the Puppet* was written by a renowned High Elf Master Magician. He was Level-9, and this book was infamous for being obscure in the Isle of Dawn. Most Magicians had to read it with a mindset of going on an arduous journey. They needed at least half a year to get a basic idea.

Now, this human Magician had only spent four hours reading it. It was frightening.

Milda was reading this book too, but she struggled with it. Seeing how relaxed Link was, she was in disbelief. Taking the book, she pointed at a Mana equation and asked,

"What do you use this isometric Mana equation for?"

"To manage the magic puppet's intelligence," Link answered matter-of-factly. Then he said, "Actually, it has a small error. Magic puppet intelligence created with this equation will occasionally have locked logic. I think if you change it like this, it might be useful, but this is just a thought for now..."

Link began talking happily while the three High Elves listened in confusion. Milda could understand some of it. From what she comprehended, Link was right.

"Okay, spatial Magicians are all monsters!" Milda closed the book. She completely acknowledged Link's magic talent now.

Morrowson felt the same. Clutching his head, he asked painfully, "Mr. Link, what equation did you get the spatial magic from?"

Link shrugged. "To be honest, my spell involved all the results from the last twenty pages. If you're interested, I can point them out..."

Morrowson quickly stopped him. "Thanks, but no thanks. I'll take my time, really."

He had given up deep down. If the first half was this hard, he felt a migraine coming just from imagining what the results of the last twenty pages were like. He would have to apply the difficult theories to the spells and use it with ease too.

I'll just continue learning my elemental magic then. I never want to touch spatial stuff again in my life! So what if I embarrassed myself in the East Cove Magic Academy? It's better than killing myself over this.

At this time, the carriage arrived at the Scorched Ridge. After a week of absence, there were many changes.

The surrounding stone lands had been plowed into the soil, people had already started planting crops, and there was more foliage on the barren earth. The plowed soil was very fertile, and weeds and saplings all thrived.

There were more residents in the surrounding area as well. Crude houses had appeared, including cabins and tents made of hide. At a glance, it seemed like a small town.

In the distance, the foundation of the Mage Tower had been established. Dozens of Magicians and workers bustled around it. Everything was prospering.

Milda and the High Elves also saw the Mage Tower. Milda mused and said, "You don't seem to have enough workers. Morrowson, Alar, you two stay here and help."

Since it was the princess's order, the two High Elves nodded.

Link needed this too, and he thanked her profusely. Looking up at the sky, he realized night was falling. He said, "Your Highness, it is getting late. Since we've arrived at my village, why don't you rest for the night and set off tomorrow?"

Milda naturally agreed.

The carriage rode into the Scorched Ridge and stopped before the Administrative Building. When they got off, Joshua, the clerk, welcomed them. He said to Link, "Lord, you're finally back. There's a magic letter for you."

Joshua handed a cowhide envelope to Link. Glancing at it, Link's brows knitted because there was a dark rune on it. A dark aura permeated it.

Who would send a letter like this to him? Vance? No, that old guy would never do something so unreliable because it would give Link trouble. Being involved with dark magic would be troublesome for him.

While he was still figuring it out, Milda had also descended from the carriage. Her gaze was attracted by the letter.

"There's a problem with this letter," Milda said discreetly, waiting for Link's explanation.

It was not just Milda. Morrowson and Alar also looked at Link with instinctive suspicion.

# Chapter 247

## A Corruption Scheme

The greatest drive for someone to attain more knowledge is their curiosity.

There was no distinction of good and bad in curiosity. However, magic was a different story altogether.

Without constraints, a Magician would venture further into the path of magic and eventually succumb to the immense knowledge, becoming merely a lifeless puppet of magic. That would already be the optimal result. More often than not, many Magicians would end up dabbling in dark magic out of curiosity and eventually becoming a degenerate slave of darkness.

There had been many of such examples in history. Blood Demon Talon, Morestern, Andrew and just recently, Wavier were all exceptional talents with a bright future that ended up on the wrong path.

This applied even to the Dark Elves. There had been many cases where talented young Magicians fell to the dark side, and so, when Milda saw this magic letter engraved in dark runes, she started looking at Link suspiciously. After Wavier of the South—would the magic genius of the Norton Kingdom be the next to succumb to the forbidden knowledge of dark magic?

This was Milda's first-day meeting Link, and she had no prior understanding of his personality. She instinctively doubted Link and found a serious problem with this magic letter.

She stared at Link coldly and said, "Link, I believe this needs some explanation."

Link frowned as well. He still had not rationalized the purpose of this letter, or even the identity of the person who had sent it. However, he had a clear conscience and he said, "Let's first enter the house and go to the second floor. I will open the letter on the spot to see what exactly is written."

The three High Elves exchanged glances as guarded expressions appeared on their

faces. They started grabbing their wands tightly in their hands. Milda then said, "There is no need to. Here will do."

They looked ready to strike the moment they felt something was amiss.

One could not blame them for overreacting. After all, the incident regarding Wavier had already reached the ears of the High Elves.

Wavier had attacked his fellow Magicians and even his mentor in the heat of the moment and resulted in a tragedy. Link was at least ten times more dangerous than Wavier. If he went insane right on the spot, the situation would be even more disastrous than what happened in the South. They had to be prepared.

From Link's perspective, he would have agreed to open that letter on the spot if he were the only one present. However, many people were standing next to him. Joshua, the mercenaries and the residents of Scorched Ridge had all crowded around to join in the commotion.

A few Magicians clad in glamorous robes looking at each other under a tense atmosphere was bound to attract attention. Before long, there would be rumors spreading around.

It was extremely disadvantageous for Link for this incident to have happened on his territory.

Link was slightly enraged by Milda's actions. However, after seeing the determined expression on the High Elves' faces, he knew that getting angry would be for naught. The other part was a High Elf Princess, and she had two Level-7 Magicians as her bodyguards. She had personally attended to many crises and important events before. It would be difficult to change her mind once she had decided on something.

Going against such a strong-willed person would only make things worse.

I wonder who is plotting against me? To think that they would send me such a sinister thing!

Keeping his anger under control, Link took a step back and said, "As you wish."

He then prepared to open the letter.

At that moment, a voice sounded from his side, "Master Link, you have finally returned. We were expecting you."

Link looked behind him and saw Master Ferdinand and Master Grenci walking towards him.

As they came closer, Grenci glanced at the letter in Link's hand then looked at the guarded expressions on the High Elves' face before saying calmly, "It's just a magic letter. There is nothing too serious about it. Let's talk in the room."

As he spoke, he stretched his hand to take the letter from Link's hand and entered the house.

Ferdinand then followed as he patted Link gently on the shoulders. He then faced the three High Elves and said, "Young people, don't worry too much. It is merely a small affair. Let's go."

With the help of two experienced Master Magicians, Milda and the other two High Elves hesitated for a moment before they finally agreed to enter the wooden house.

They then reached the parliament hall on the second floor and got seated.

After they got settled, Grenci said, "This letter arrived two days ago. We felt something was amiss the moment it arrived. However, the letter was addressed to Master Link. We left it untouched until he returned."

After which, he stared at Link. Although his expression was calm, it could be seen that he was also waiting for Link's explanation.

Link then replied with a puzzled expression, "I am also curious as to who would send such things to me."

Following which, he pushed this letter to the middle of the table and said, "Your Highness Milda seems to suspect my integrity. For fairness sake, I will not open this letter myself. Your Highness, I would like you to open it personally."

"Alright." Milda nodded her head and activated the Magician's Hand, opening the letter from afar.

Upon opening this letter, the dark aura surrounding it intensified. One could clearly



see a cloud of black smoke emerging from the envelope. This smoke then started congregating above the envelope, forming a human face which started speaking in a cheerful voice.

"Hey, Link, my good friend. I'm glad that you are interested in my domain of magic. I missed you so much after we parted last time. I feel extremely honored to receive your letter, and I am happy to answer some of your doubts regarding the domain of Soul Magic."

The voice then rambled on.

He spoke in great detail about the techniques to extract a person's soul from their physical body. This went on for about 15 minutes before he ended by saying, "This method is extremely useful. However, it is merely the foundation. If you are interested to know more, please continue writing to me. I will be more than happy to answer any queries."

The black smoke then dissipated and the magic letter returned to its original form. There was also a grey paper in the letter. Milda pulled out the paper which revealed the exact content of what was just said.

She then looked at the bottom of the paper and saw a detestable name, Wavier Warsling.

Milda was horrified and gasped, "Link, you had connections with Wavier?"

Link denied, "I did not."

Romilson then interrupted, "Master Link, the letter mentioned that you once made a trip to the South... from what I know, you indeed made that trip a while ago. You even brought back a Wind Tiger from that journey."

As the Magician the High Elves valued and feared, they had done comprehensive research on Link's actions and background. While Link's visit to the South could be concealed from the ordinary folks, it was no secret to a Magician, much less the High Elves.

Romilson did not complete his entire sentence. However, his underlying message was clear. This letter showed that Link and Wavier indeed knew each other by name and that he had made a trip to the South especially just to meet him. They seemed to be on

good terms.

However, Wavier had already become a Dark Magician. The fact that he was still writing to Link and discussing dark magic issues with him was peculiar.

This was especially so as Wavier fell to the dark side not long after Link's trip to the South.

Link's face remained calm as he explained, "I went to the South to search for Celine. It has nothing to do with Wavier. As for the Wind Tiger, I simply met him on the road. He was on the run from Dark Magician Andrew, and I saved his life."

"Who is Celine?" Milda asked.

"My... good friend." Link said, "If there is a need, I can call her down right now. She is right here at Scorched Ridge."

"There would be no need to; I know Celine personally. She is a wonderful girl." Ferdinand said.

He then looked around before he continued, "I believe that this is a clear set-up against Master Link. I know Master Link very well. If he truly had dabbled into dark magic, he would not allow himself to be exposed by such juvenile tactics. In fact, none of us would be this careless. This is too dumb!"

It was the truth. Sending an open letter and deliberately engraving dark runes on the front of the envelope was an obvious framing technique.

However, Milda shook her head as she said, "No, I don't think that the issue is this simple. This is Link's territory, and the ordinary people will not have recognized the dark runes. It is thus a fallacy to come to a conclusion based on the dark runes alone. While the letter itself is peculiar to begin with, Link had indeed made a recent visit to the South. Other than bringing back Celine and the Wind Tiger, no one knew what happened along the way."

On this note, Milda then turned towards Link as she continued, "I have actually noticed something when I saw your military report in the academy. In the report you made at Ice Peak Fortress, you mentioned a realm scroll that allowed you to travel in between realms. You seemed to have escaped the pursuit of the Divine Gear wielder many times using this scroll. Based on my knowledge, the realm scroll belongs to the domain of

Secret Magic. Master Link, are you experimenting with Secret Magic?"

Link fell silent. Princess Milda was indeed extremely sensitive. She had easily discovered the detail Link wanted to cover up in the entire incident.

Milda then continued after getting no reply from Link. She said, "I noticed another problem. You mentioned that Kanorse had been corrupted by the Dark Serpent's venom and was about to be demonized. However, you managed to save him from the depths of despair. How did you do it? You are merely a mortal, and it is impossible for you to cure a status inflicted by a Divine Gear. It does not make any sense."

Grenci then stood up for Link as he sternly reminded, "Your Highness, every Magician has his own unique strength. This has nothing to do with dark magic. You have no right to pursue this matter!"

"Alright then." Milda then suppressed her aggressiveness as she continued, "Before this letter, I have totally aligned myself with Master Grenci's point of view. However, the appearance of the letter and Master Link's inability to give a convincing explanation makes him extremely suspicious. Before we get to the bottom of this issue, I'm afraid my race will not be able to render assistance to such a Magician. Link, Romilson and Latour might not be able to help with the construction of your Mage Tower."

Link then laid out his hands helplessly as he said, "I'm sorry to have caused this misunderstanding."

He did not blame Milda for her reaction. She had only known him for a while, and it was understandable that she would not trust him as much as his fellow compatriots. The most important thing now was to figure out the person who was framing him.

Could it be Wavier?

But why would he do that? Although they sparred against each other when Link went South to rescue Celine, he should not have discovered his identity.

"I cannot stay here anymore. We will set off now. Romilson, return to the academy to convey this message. Request that King Leon form a special investigation team for this issue. Latour, accompany me to the port. We will return to the Isle of Dawn with the information regarding the Divine Gear."

"Yes, Your Highness." The two High Elves nodded.

"Then, farewell gentlemen." Milda left without any hesitation as the two High Elves followed behind.

Only three human Magicians were left in the room.

Ferdinand was still infuriated as he said, "The High Elves do not listen to reason! This is obviously a set-up!"

Grenci then stared at the letter on the table as he shook his head and said, "They don't understand Master Link as much as we do. It is understandable that they have such a reaction out of self-protection."

Following which, Grenci turned towards Link and said, "Master Link, there is another thing which we have kept hidden from the High Elves. Apart from this letter, someone sent a box of items. These items exuded an extremely sinister aura, and we had to open it without your permission. The box was filled with dark soul stones. We did not dare to mention this in front of the High Elves."

Link frowned upon hearing these words. After a long while, he muttered, "I thank the two masters for having such faith in me. However, the issue might not be as simple as it seems. Someone is plotting against me."

Grenci and Ferdinand exchanged glances and nodded before saying, "We have the same idea as well. You have been too outstanding recently. The dark forces excel in plotting against someone in the shadows. You are bound to be one of their targets. The problem is that their ploys are often difficult to detect and defend against. No one knows how they are going to execute their plan."

Link then fell into deep thought. Three minutes later, he said, "This letter and the dark soul stones are just child's play. If this is truly a set-up, this is only the beginning.

A letter and a few dark soul stones were obvious framing techniques that could be easily taken care of. However, if something more serious happened, these items would then become added evidence against Link. By then, it would be difficult for Link to explain himself.

Grenci and Ferdinand exchanged glances as they kept a troubled expression on their faces.

"What would happen next?"

"I don't know... there has been an influx of new residents into the territory recently, there must be spies mixed into the lot... Hold up... Milda might be in danger. Yes, not just her, all the Magicians in our territory, especially the High Elves would be in danger. No, they cannot leave right now, it is way too dangerous!"

There were over 30 Magicians in the territory. It was only a modest number, and they were all not strong individually as well. It was only the beginning of the territory's development phase, and the defensive strength of the territory was naturally weak. While they might not be able to kill Link, they should be able to exterminate these Magicians.

They could then frame this heinous act on Link after doing so. That would be disastrous!

Ordinary people would not be able to distinguish such facts and would definitely accuse Link as the perpetrator. The investigative team from East Cove Higher Magic Academy would then find many relevant pieces of evidence against him. Link would then be unable to explain himself and would fall victim to this scheme!

This was the worst result, and despite the slim chances of its occurrence, Link must still be prepared to defend against it.

Ferdinand and Grenici then exchanged glances as fear and horror flashed through their eyes. They then stood up and said, "We will get Romilson back."

Link then nodded and said, "I will take care of Milda and Latour."

The three of them walked briskly out of the wooden house. By the time they reached the entrance, they had realized that the sun had sunk below the horizon and the sky was getting darker by the minute.

Milda was extremely efficient as well. They had already left the territory without leaving any traces behind.

Link then headed towards the shack where Dorias stayed and was prepared to use him as a convenient mode of transport. However, Link did not manage to find him when he reached the shack.

"Where is Dorias?" Link asked a soldier nearby.

"Dorias? He mentioned that he heard something unusual and went out to patrol. He said that he would be back swiftly," the soldier answered.

Link was horrified. Are they luring the tiger out from its home ground?

# Chapter 248

## Celine's Nightmare

Link had run into trouble with the dark magic letter as soon as he returned to the territory. He was unfamiliar with the territory's current situation.

Hearing that Dorias had gone out to patrol, he was a little shocked. Rather than making a brash conclusion, he continued asking, "Does Dorias go out often?"

"He'd occasionally go for a stroll, especially when he's full. He just ate a cow." The soldier didn't find anything odd.

Okay, since Dorias wasn't here, Link could only rely on magic spells to catch up to Milda. Fortunately, she had only left five minutes ago. She shouldn't be far. Thinking of this, Link walked to the east gate of the Scorched Ridge camp. After walking a few dozen feet, he saw Lucy coming from the civilian area outside the camp. He called out to her.

"Lord, you've returned?" She looked joyful.

"Yes, I just got back. I need you to do something!" Link said seriously.

"Please tell me." Lucy grew serious as well.

"Go find Jacker and tell him to increase the patrols of the Magician area at night. Tell him that someone might attack the Magicians tonight. He mustn't let anything happen!"

The attack was Link's guess and might not happen but better to be safe than sorry.

Lucy had a stern expression. She nodded and said, "Don't worry. Nothing bad will happen!"

"Good."

Link continued toward the east gate. When he passed a cabin, he suddenly heard a

familiar voice.

"Link, hey, over here. Look here."

He turned and saw Celine. She was leaning against the cabin's window with her head stuck out, waving at him. Bent over, hiding by the window, with only half her face revealed, she looked like a thief.

Link found the sight funny. His tension lifted a little. Walking to the window, he laughed and asked, "What are you doing?"

Celine was in no mood to joke. She ran to the door and cracked it open, peeking out. "Come in. I have something to tell you."

Link was troubled. He was on the way to get Milda back, so he said, "Why don't you wait a little? I'm busy."

Celine pouted unhappily. "This is important too."

Okay, fine. Link would put that proud princess to the side. He entered the cabin. "Okay, but I'm only giving you five minutes."

"Five minutes is enough." A smile bloomed on Celine's face. She pulled Link into a corner and took out a basic wand. She focused, and the wand instantly glowed with white light; with it came a very strange aura.

Link wavered. He had actually been affected.

A voice sounded in his mind. It was the spirit of the Storm Lord's sword.

"The girl's bloodline talent has started awakening. This is a mysterious power."

Pleased, Link patted Celine's shoulder and praised, "Very good."

"Ah, it's not that." Celine was still anxious. She said, "The main point isn't the power. It's the changes it brings. For some reason, I keep getting nightmares these days."

"Nightmares?" Link's heart jumped.

There were two situations if a person continuously had nightmares. The first was a



health problem. While sleeping, the brain would receive the weak signals from the body and react with a nightmare. These were commonly seen in the average man.

The second was that a person's soul had a bad premonition, but because the future is always changing, it would create unclear and terrifying images during sleep. This usually happened to Magicians. Some with special talents were especially sensitive.

Before the Level-8 demon Tarviss escaped, Link and Herrera all had nightmares. Reality had proved them correct.

Celine obviously had no health problems. Her cheeks were ruddy, and her skin was clear. She was plump, and her eyes were bright. She was very healthy, so it must be the second situation.

She was still caught up in her nightmare. Worried, she said, "I don't know why I suddenly got this power either. Do you think the nightmares have something to do with it?"

In Celine's eyes, Link was the authority of magic. They were very close too, so she obviously went to him about something private like nightmares.

Link comforted her, "There should be some relation, but it's not a big problem. Tell me, what's in your nightmares?"

"They're scary." Celine's eyes were fearful. "I dreamed that the Scorched Ridge turned into a sea of blood. Corpses floated everywhere. A bunch of blurry black shadows ran around. They were so fast and killed anyone they saw. A shadow saw me so I ran, but I couldn't get away. I saw you too, covered in blood. You were screaming, and Lucy was on the ground. Her eyes were open, but she was dead... Ah, I can't talk about it!"

As she spoke, Celine was touched by the horrible scenes in her nightmare. Tears sprang in her eyes and rolled down.

Link was chilled. Seeing Celine like this, he felt tender affection toward her. He involuntarily pulled her into his arms and murmured, "It's okay, it's just a dream. I'm here for you."

Celine nodded lightly.

Link looked calm, but he was the opposite inside. In his mind, the Storm Lord Sword's voice sounded again.

"Kid, the bloodline governed by the soul has very strong prediction abilities. This dream will probably come true."

"I know." As a Magician, he would definitely not overlook such an obvious premonition of danger. Thinking a bit, Link said, "Celine, let's go. I'll take you to someone."

At first, he wanted to go find Milda alone. After hearing this dream, he did not dare leave Celine in Scorched Ridge alone.

Without thinking too much about it, Celine nodded.

Link brought Celine out of the cabin and ran into Jacker. The big guy seemed to have already received Lucy's message and was busy arranging Scorched Ridge's defense. Seeing Link, he walked over and saluted seriously. "Lord."

Looking at him, Link realized that Jacker's war aura had risen to Level-5. The epic Battle Art was extraordinary. Within a short period, Jacker had had a breakthrough. It was great!

Link said, "I feel that something bad will happen. There might be trouble. Alert the camp that all Magicians must be on guard."

"I understand."

Link thought of something else. "Is Eliard still at Scorched Ridge?"

Jacker nodded. "He's always been here. Recently, he's helping with the Mage Tower."

"Good. If—and I mean if—something happens, protect him."

"Yes." Jacker grew solemn. He could sense the danger in Link's tone.

"Very good. High Elf Princess Milda has left the camp, but it's too late. I'm worried she'll run into danger, so I'm going to get her back. The safety of the camp during this time depends on you."

Jacker slammed a fist against his chest, promising as a soldier. Link nodded and

summoned a Wind Fenrir. He helped Celine up the beast and then climbed up behind her.

With a low roar, the Wind Fenrir pounced forward.

The Wind Fenrir's speed was around seventy-six yards per second. But even at this speed, Link traveled more than ten miles without seeing the High Elf Princess. He could only sense a faint Mana presence.

"It seems that the princess has also used magic for quick traveling," Link said to Celine in his arms.

Scorched Ridge was very small. Celine had also seen Milda's entourage, so she grew doubtful. "Are you talking about that group of snobby High Elves? I saw that they weren't polite with you."

Link nodded. "They truly weren't very polite, and I don't like them either. But compared to the alliance between our races, these are just small things. I can't let her run into trouble while on my land."

A mature lord would never let personal affairs affect politics. In politics, there were no relationships, only interests. Without interests, even family could cut ties. Of course, Link would not go to that extent. He had his own bottom line. For Princess Milda, his bottom line was currently to make sure nothing would happen to her while she was here so he wouldn't get into trouble.

They had traveled another mile while talking. Link suddenly stopped. "Huh? How come the Mana disappeared?"

There were four more kilometers from the pier. It was a lowland with small hills everywhere and had an unclear view. Without the Mana for guidance, Link paused. He was ready to make the Wind Fenrir run up a hill to observe.

However, as soon as he thought of this, dozens of black shadows snuck out of the hills. Then Link heard a hoarse voice order, "Shoot!"

There were the clicks of triggers and then the whistles of arrows tearing through the air.

"Careful!" Celine cried reflexively before falling silent. She once was a powerful

Warrior as well with rich battle experience. She knew that she shouldn't distract Link right now.

Link reacted extremely fast. The moment the black shadows appeared, his gaze hardened, and he activated Edelweiss, the Level-5 defensive spell. Then, he released a single directional Flame Blast at a shadow.

When the enemies shot the arrows, the Flame Blast exploded as well. With a boom, the cone-shaped flame tide flooded towards the shadows.

However, what happened next shocked Link.

The shadows reacted extremely fast as well. Link had only used 0.3 seconds to release the Flame Blast 32 yards away. The spell had a range of more than 20 yards, but the enemy actually dodged it.

In addition to dodging, he attacked as well.

Link was taken aback. He thought, How come they're so confident that they think arrows can break through my defense spell?

Just in case, Link entered a state of absolute focus. Time slowed instantly. He discovered that the arrows were abnormal. They were a bruised color with an eerie blue glow around it. Through the glow, he could see a large number of small runes.

Oh no! he thought. These are super anti-magic arrows! My Edelweiss can't stop them!

The super anti-magic arrows used magic gold made from alchemy. Magic Disturbance Formations as high as Level-5 were carved on them. They were different from regular anti-magic arrows. Rather than using force to break through defensive spells, they destroyed the spell by disturbing the spell's Mana structure.

Usually, these arrows could destroy defense spells up to Level-6. Because of the arrows' extreme speed, most Magicians had no time to activate spells up to that level. That was why super anti-magic arrows were known as a Magician's Kryptonite.

Link reacted quickly. Sensing danger, he used the last one-tenth of a second to use his consummate skill—the Spatial Lens.

With a light hum, the air began twisting. Ripples appeared in the air around Link and

Celine.

The next instance, the arrows shot into the distorted air.

Spatial power could affect everything. As long as its power was not past the magic's limit, Link could control the distortion to stop the arrows.

The limit was the peak of Level-7. This was not because spatial magic couldn't do it, but because spells at Level-7 would affect the structure of the spatial Mana, causing it to collapse.

Obviously, a few arrows were far from the top of Level-7.

In the distorted space, the arrows cut straight paths. They brushed past Link and Celine and shot out without causing any harm.

"Retreat!" The black shadow was straightforward. Seeing that no arrows hit the target, he immediately tried to retreat.

But how could Link let them go so easily?

# Chapter 249

## There Is More Than One High Elf Princess

Ferde Wilderness, Dusk.

There were over 15 of these infiltrators. They moved at an extremely fast speed and scattered the moment they entered the territory. When Link was running up the small hill on the Wind Fenrir, the fastest one was already more than 150 feet away.

Furthermore, these infiltrators were making use of the Ferde Wilderness' terrain to hide themselves from Link's vision.

Link glanced around before decisively charging towards a figure in the front.

From the sneak attack previously, the leader of this mission said only a total of two words. He even snuck into the crowd before giving the signal to begin and wore the same black leather armor as his other underlings. However, Link had already detected the faint fluctuations in his Battle Aura and locked onto his target.

This black leather armored infiltrator was running for his life across the Ferde Wilderness. He would look behind him every so often while wearing an expression of panic.

The distance between Link and himself gradually closed up from 150 feet to 135 feet, and then, 120 feet. The area in front of them was an open field and no longer provided any form of shelter for the infiltrators. Link was prepared to land the first strike.

However, Celine, who was currently in his arms suddenly shouted, "Link, stop! It's dangerous!"

Link had a shred of doubt in his heart when he saw the flustered expression and movements of this infiltrator. He seemed completely different from the time when he calmly commanded the infiltration scheme. He should have been a lot more composed.

Link hence suspected that he was merely putting up an act.

Celine's warning then further proved his suspicions, and he immediately pulled the Wind Fenrir to a stop.

The moment he halted his movements, Link could feel a faint magic fluctuation emanating from the ground. He then cast an Eagle's Eye spell on himself and observed the peculiarities on the ground. What he saw came as a great shock to him.

Through the thin layer of gravel on the ground cleverly used as a disguise, Link saw a sinister, dark-colored glow which exuded an extremely faint dark energy. From the fluctuations, it was a dark magic circle Level-6 in strength!

If Celine had not warned him about the dangers, he would have not noticed this faint fluctuation and would have rushed right into this magic circle. Following which, both of them would be gravely injured if he had failed to react in time to this trap.

Link felt a shiver down his spine.

He then looked around for the leader of the infiltrators, but he was already nowhere to be found. The leader had kept his full power hidden previously. However, the moment he realized that his trump card had not worked to his favor, he immediately made the decision to escape.

The traveling speed of these infiltrators was outrageous as well; they were no slower than the ghouls in the Dark Forest.

Who the hell are these guys? How strong are they? Link still had many questions he still had not figured out. Although Wavier's name was on the letter, Link felt that it was only a framing technique employed by the infiltrators.

"How sinister!" Link frowned. He then moved a total distance of 30 feet backwards before firing a Glass Orb towards the dark magic circle.

Boom! The magic circle was activated, and a 15-foot-tall pillar of ghastly blue flames erupted from the ground. It then rose to a height of 90 feet before disintegrating slowly. Despite being more than 30 feet away from the heart of the spell, Link could still feel the heatwaves on his skin.

"Level-6 spell, the Heart of the Abyss." Link heaved a sigh of relief and felt Celine trembling from behind. He then held her hand and comforted, "It's okay. Even if we stepped on it, I would transport you away using teleportation."

Celine merely nodded before saying, "Link, will my nightmare really come true?"

She was starting to understand her newfound strength better. She realized that in the face of imminent danger, an extremely clear premonition would appear in the mind, even to the point of generating a clear image in her head. Previously, she stopped Link simply because she saw the ghastly blue pillar of flames in her mind.

Link then assured, "It will not. From the moment you told me the nightmare, the future had already begun to change."

As Link spoke, he gazed in the direction of the port. From that direction, he could not feel the presence of the High Elf Princess Milda. He thus had no more clues on where to carry on the search.

Link then rode the Wind Fenrir back down the hill and ordered it to circle the area while he carefully observed its perimeter.

"There are 35 crossbow arrows on the ground. The opponent had only fired 22 crossbow arrows previously. The remaining 13 should be the ones that were fired when Milda passed through. However, there are no remnants of any magic fluctuations in this area. The two High Elves seemed to have disappeared into thin air... Wait, this is a blood stain!"

Link concentrated and willed a few gravel on the ground towards him. He then observed the blood stains on the rocks. They were dark red in color, similar to the blood stains of humans. He then placed them close to his nose and picked up a faint forest fragrance from the rocks.

"This is blood from the High Elves. They must be injured."

"But where did they go?" Celine asked while frowning.

"They must have used a transportation spell. However, the furthest distance of a transportation spell is no more than a mile. They must have continued escaping on foot after that. We have no idea where they went."

Although a mile was not a far distance, the other party was injured and in a state of panic. They would only be concentrating on their own survival and would do anything possible to conceal their presence. They would also run as far away from the battle site as possible, making it difficult for anyone to locate them.



Link was wondering if Milda would even accuse him of being the mastermind behind this assassination, causing her to avoid him all the more.

However, the problem lay with the Assassins. They must also be looking for the High Elves. Judging from their injuries, they would be doomed if they were ever discovered by the enemy.

They had gone missing on his territory, and Princess Milda was coincidentally the eldest daughter of the High Elf queen. She was also the top candidate for the next elf queen. If he could not bring her back safely to the Isle of Dawn, he would have no end of it from the High Elves.

After thinking for a moment, Link turned and bolted straight towards the coastline.

He possessed the fresh blood of a High Elf. While this might be useless in his hands, Vance might be able to track a person using this blood. As long as he could determine Milda's exact location, he could travel there and rescue her immediately.

As Link thought, he increased the speed of the Wind Fenrir and ran at full speed towards Vance.

However, Link stopped merely after a few steps. He then hesitated for a while before charging in the opposite direction straight towards Scorched Ridge.

"Weren't you prepared to find Vance? Why have you turned back?" Celine said. She truly was an intelligent woman. She had already guessed Link's intention despite his silence all this while.

Link then shook his head as he said, "My return trip to Scorched Ridge is an impromptu decision. The enemy's sneak attack will naturally be an impromptu one as well. However, you predicted in your nightmare that the territory would be in great danger. It is not worth it to save a High Elf Princess in exchange for over 8000 lives on the territory."

The refugees from the Delonga Kingdom had been traveling north in big batches towards the Ferde Wilderness. Merchant Warter had also been extremely efficient in bringing in slaves which caused the population of the territory to rocket upwards. Scorched Ridge was now a little town of nearly 10000 residents.

"But if the High Elf Princess were to die, you would be in trouble."

"That is indeed troubling, but the High Elves has more than one princess." Link had clearly thought this through.

This was an impromptu attack. The enemy had already managed to set-up an ambush party and even drew up a Level-6 magic circle. Both of them required delicate planning, craftsmanship, and more importantly, time. They should not be able to launch an attack on both sides in a short amount of time.

Since Milda had already suffered the brunt of the attack, Romilson should be safe. He should already be brought back safely to the territory by the two Master Magicians.

Romilson would then become Link's perfect alibi. This was because Link had stayed with them the entire time since East Cove Higher Magic Academy and had no time to arrange such a complicated set-up.

It was this exact thought that helped Link make the decision to give up on rescuing the princess and protect his own territory instead. Politics was all about interests after all. As the lord of the territory, Link was responsible for the safety of his residents.

The return trip to the territory was smooth. Traveling at the top speed of the Wind Fenrir, they reached the east gate of the camp around five minutes later.

At this moment, the sky had already darkened, and the east gate was closed. There was a large number of soldiers patrolling the castle walls. Link then cast an illumination spell on himself to reveal his identity.

"It's me."

Link did not wait for the soldiers to open the door. He commanded the Wind Fenrir to leap forward. The moment the Wind Fenrir was airborne, he then cast a Weight Reducing spell on it, allowing it to leap to a height sixty feet tall. The Wind Fenrir then leaped comfortably over the castle wall without any obstructions.

The security within the camp was also heightened. The moment Link entered the camp, he immediately canceled the casting of Wind Fenrir and whispered to Celine, "Follow me closely, don't get lost."

He felt that the entire Scorched Ridge was unsafe.

"I know." Celine followed closely behind Link.

After a few steps, Gildern came forward to welcome them. Link then asked, "Has Master Grenci returned?"

Gildern then reported the good news, "Master Grenci, Master Ferdinand, and the High Elf named Romilson are all back safely."

Link immediately felt rejuvenated and said, "That's great. Where are they now?"

"Inside Master Grenci's abode."

Link then felt a weight lifted off his shoulders and asked, "What about Dorias, is he back?"

Gildern then had a worried expression on his face as he said, "We can't seem to find him anywhere. He would usually be back by this time. We have no idea where he went."

"Understood." Link could not do anything about this issue either. A tiger with such a monstrous size and outrageous speed would be impossible to find in the night. He could only pray for his safety.

Link then took Celine towards the Magician's residential area in the Scorched Ridge. The Scorched Ridge was only a few hundred feet in radius. They reached Master Grenci's quarters within three minutes.

After a few knocks, the door opened as Grenci's weathered face appeared behind the door. He then glanced around, seemingly searching for the High Elves. A frown then appeared on his face as he said, "Something happened?"

Link nodded as he took out the rocks stained with blood and said, "Celine and I gave chase and were ambushed by a team of Assassins. After defeating them, I found this on the ground. It should be clear that Princess Milda and Latour suffered injuries from the ambush and left using a transportation spell. As for their exact location, we were not able to locate them."

"Please come in." Grenci then invited them in.

Link saw Romilson the moment he entered the room. Romilson was completely pale and even had a blood stain on his elbow. He looked disheveled and seemed to have gone through some tough times. Upon seeing Link, he instinctively searched the room and asked with a hoarse voice, "Where is the princess? Why didn't she come back?"

"This was all I found when I arrived." Link then placed all the rocks stained with blood on the table.

Romilson face grew even paler as he grabbed these rocks and sniffed them as if in a trance. Half a minute later, with god knows what method, he muttered, "Latour is already dead, his blood is not showing any signs of life. The princess is still alive, though she has suffered heavy injuries. This will not do; I have to find her now."

"How will you do that? I believe you have met those Assassins as well; how will you deal with 15 Assassins at once?" Link asked.

"There are 15 of them?" Romilson was close to losing his consciousness from the shock. He had met four Assassins on his way to the academy and was already lucky to escape alive. If not for the timely arrival of Master Grenci and Master Ferdinand, he would definitely be dead. Going through with this mission with the knowledge that 15 Assassins were lying in wait would simply be suicide.

However, the princess must not die. If the princess died while he stayed alive, he would become the disgrace of his family!

"I have to rescue her! The princess' blood can guide me towards her; I will be able to find her!" Romilson stood up and was prepared to leave.

Link was just about to stop him when roaring sounds could be heard from outside the door, "Enemy...!"

After only half a sentence, the voice seemed to be cut off by some sinister force.

"Arrgghh! Uhh!"

A large number of screams could be heard. The frequency and despair from those screams were enough to make anyone's hair stand on end.

# Chapter 250

## Human Ghouls?

When the concentrated cries traveled over, everyone in the cabin was shocked.

Link immediately walked out. He did not care about convincing Romilson anymore. When he passed the man, he suddenly shouted, "Romilson!"

"Huh?" Romilson was frightened. He didn't know why the usually calm Link would suddenly be like this.

Before he could react, Link hit the back of Romilson's neck. He acted decisively. No one could have guessed that a Magician would fight physically instead of with magic.

With this hit, Romilson's eyes rolled back, and he collapsed to the ground—he passed out.

"Uh..." Grenci and Ferdinand were dumbfounded. They didn't know what Link was planning.

Link hurriedly explained, "He would definitely go back to save the princess, but with the current situation, he'll certainly die. We need him alive. Otherwise, if anything happens to the princess, we won't be able to explain it."

Romilson was a witness to prove the innocence of the Ferde Wilderness and the Norton Kingdom. Afterwards, Romilson and the High Elf Kingdom would hate the humans for this, but they were forced to do so.

The two Master Magicians shuddered. They were old and wise; they instantly understood the meaning behind Link's actions and nodded.

"Sirs, I'll hand him over to you two while I go out to deal with the attackers." They were two Level-6 Master Magicians. Link believed that the attackers would be unable to break through their Advanced Defensive Barrier within a short period.

With that, Link shot a glance at Celine. The two walked towards the cabin's exit.

At the door, Link stopped. He pulled out the Burning Wrath of Heavens wand and murmured to Celine, "Follow closely."

Being with those two old guys should be safe, but after hearing Celine's dream, Link subconsciously wanted to keep Celine by his side. Only then would he be reassured.

After Celine nodded, Link activated the spell, Edelweiss and opened the door.

The moment he did so, a figure outside pounced on him. He was so fast. At the same time, he raised an arm, and a crossbow appeared.

Pop! Pop! Pop! The crossbow fired continuously at Link, each one glowing with an eerie blue. They were super anti-magic arrows!

Using the magic lantern inside the cabin, Link saw the attacker's features clearly. He had a black mask, only revealing his eyes and some bits of skin. The eyes were dark brown and contained signs of a familiar rune. His skin was grayish brown and looked scary.

Link flinched. He thought, A human with runes in his eyes... is it a human ghoul?

The attacker's inhuman speed proved that. Since it was a ghoul, Link knew what to do. Faced with the flying anti-magic arrows, his eyes focused, and he pointed at the attacker with the Burning Wrath of Heavens wand.

"Spatial Distortion!"

The structure of Spatial Distortion was not complex and didn't need time to gather elements. It was created in an instant.

The three people in the cabin saw Link raise his wand and twist the air before him. There were three pops, and three arrows changed direction, burying into a wall on the side. Immediately after, there was a sharp shriek—it was the spell, Whistle. Then, there was a soft thud. A Whistle had crashed into the charging figure, and he was stopped.

This was not all. Without ceasing, the air before Link blurred. This time, it was a Vector Throwing Force Field. Under this force field, the Whistle hit the figure and forced him back.

This retreat gave Link enough time to cast an advanced magic spell!

With a whoosh, fire elements gathered quickly in the air. After 0.3 seconds, Titan's Fist appeared, rushing down at the figure.

The figure was still retreating and had to maintain his balance. Hence, he had no time to dodge. Titan's Fist flung him in the air and then grasped him, clenching tightly. He was burnt to a crisp instantly!

The Assassin had overestimated himself by trying to fight Link alone. With his speed, Link might not be able to catch up if he focused on dodging. However, he chose to fight face-to-face. This was no different from looking for death.

After returning from the battlefield in the North, Link's battle techniques had improved. He could fight with ease and was practically invincible. The Assassin was no match for him.

Every move Link had just done only took one second. Those who reacted slowly couldn't even see what he did clearly. Coincidentally, the three in the cabin managed to keep up and had an idea of the order of Link's actions.

Ferdinand and Grenci exchanged glances, impressed. They knew that Link was a Battle Mage and had powerful abilities. However, they never had a concept of just how powerful he was.

Now, they saw Link kill someone with their own eyes. The two old men were speechless. Before this, they knew Link was powerful. Now, they realized he was ten times more powerful than rumored!

As for Celine, she had already seen Link's magic before. Rather than being surprised, she was a bit annoyed. This guy improved again. What a jerk. He must've gone through a lot of hardships going to the North alone!

After killing the Assassin, Link had an accurate estimate of his power. He turned back and called, "Sirs, the Assassins are similar to the northern ghouls. He was at the pinnacle of Level-6. Be careful!"

Then he walked out of the cabin with Celine following closely.

Inside, the two old men exchanged glances and started establishing the defensive

force field.

Outside, Link scanned the area. The streets of the camp were filled with Assassins in black clothing. At a glance, there were about 50 men. They didn't have a target; they killed whoever they saw with frightening efficiency.

Some soldiers tried to stop them but were killed immediately. The difference was too big; they couldn't even put up a fight.

Link saw Lucy. She had a few soldiers beside her and was preparing to block an Assassin. However, another Assassin already noticed them and was charging towards them.

Lucy was a Level-4 Assassin but was nothing compared to a ghoul at the pinnacle of Level-6. If they really fought, the ending would undoubtedly be Lucy's death.

Link focused on the Assassin and prepared to stop him. But then there was a whiz in the air. A Whistle had appeared out of thin air. It accurately dodged the Assassin's block and slammed into his face.

The Assassin stopped.

Link turned to see Eliard walk out of the cabin behind Lucy. With a stern expression, Eliard waved his wand. Whistles flew out one after another, endlessly attacking the aggressors.

He was very fast. He could release four Whistles per second, and they were all accurate. The Assassins could dodge or block as much as they wanted but on average, three out of every four Whistles would hit them square in the face.

The Assassins were masked so the Whistles couldn't injure them gravely. However, they successfully countered the Assassins' movements, greatly reducing their killing rate.

Link cheered inwardly, As expected of the number one magical genius of the continent. So awesome!

Link didn't waste any time either. He cast a Macro Sound Spell and roared, "My soldiers, your lord is here!"



The camp was in chaos, like a pack of dragons without a leader. They needed a core, and this was Link's responsibility as the lord.

He wore the robe of a Flame Controller, firelight flowing through him. He also held the wand of the Burning Wrath of Heaven that radiated with a blinding light. It was abnormally eye-catching in the dim camp.

Reassured, the soldiers immediately gathered towards him. Lucy, Gildern, Jacker, Eliard, and the others all came.

Link did not stop casting spells. He used all the old tricks against these attackers who were similar to the ghouls in the North. He used the force field to destroy the others' balance and then burned them with Titan's Fist.

He was unbelievably fast, and the Assassins had no chance. They went down at a rate of one per second.

Suddenly, one Assassin yelled, "There's only one of him. Charge and kill him!"

At this moment, there were only 40 Assassins. They immediately scattered, preparing to attack Link from all directions.

Link immediately ordered, "Retreat to the city walls. Don't get surrounded!"

If they were surrounded, Link knew he could protect the group around him by himself but only temporarily. His attacks would be greatly affected as well. If they had the sturdy stone walls behind them, they would only have the face the Assassins before them. It was much easier.

Hearing the command, everyone began retreating to the wall with Link at the center.

The Assassins attacked as if they'd gone crazy. They were constantly killed by Link, but they also killed many common soldiers. Link could not help it. Scorched Ridge lacked strong soldiers, and it was hard to fight off the Assassins' direct attacks. Even if Jacker charged forward, he would be using his life to win Link enough time to cast spells and attack.

If not for Eliard on the side, Jacker would have died many times already.

The battle intensified. The Assassins decreased by one per second, but the soldiers

were decreasing by twenty per second! Without Link, the soldiers would have been defeated long ago.

At this rate, even if Link could kill all the Assassins, the camp would suffer greatly as well. The soldiers would probably all be dead. If they were not careful, Link might not survive either.

But then, a sudden roar came from outside the walls.

"You bastards dare to fool me! Dorias is angry!"

Dorias had returned at this critical moment!

He had spent his recent days in Scorched Ridge comfortably. He had good food every day, and there was someone just for brushing his hair, picking his teeth, and cleaning his claws. When he had time, he could go have fun in the Girvent Forest. It was like living in paradise.

In his mind, Scorched Ridge was his territory. Now, people were wreaking havoc in his territory, and they'd lied to him too. This... this was unforgivable!

With an aggressive growl, a giant tiger covered in blue-green light pounced onto the wall and down to the ground. An Assassin charged at it.

With another roar, Dorias opened his claws. Dagger-like claws shot out from the pads and slapped at the Assassin.

As a Wind Magical Beast, he was shockingly fast—even faster than the Assassins. As an old monster who had lived for centuries, he had rich experience, and these Assassins were no match.

Rip! There was a tearing sound. The Assassin had been torn to shreds by Dorias' claws!

Another Assassin rushed over, trying to make a sneak attack.

As if he had eyes on the back of his head, Dorias slapped his tail down on the man's neck. The neck snapped with a crack, and his head hung limply. He fell to the ground, convulsing, but didn't die.

Link's eyes were sharp. Seeing this, he was even more confident. This type of vitality

had destroyed the equilibrium. It was definitely related to the Dark Divine Gear of the North.

Rather than retreating to the wall, he yelled, "Dorias, come here! Cover me!"

"Coming!" Dorias sprang up and landed behind Link. With this violent big cat, Link didn't have to worry anymore. He started to go all out.

Titan's Fist, Titan's Hand, Vector Force Field, Spatial Distortion were cast one after another. The Assassins in Scorched Ridge decreased rapidly.

"Retreat!" There were only ten Assassins left. They realized they had no chance and were ready to run.

"In your dreams!" Dorias rushed over like the wind. His huge body had a burst of speed faster than the enemies. Gnashing and blocking left and right, he blocked all their escape routes by himself.

With his cooperation and Titan's Fist, Link burned all the Assassins to dust in half a minute. There were only five living, left on purpose by Link.

After killing them all, the camp residences looked at Link with pure reverence. Even the Magicians from the East Cove Magic Academy had a look of awe on their faces.

They couldn't deal with a single one of these extremely powerful Assassins, but Link killed them all as if they were chickens. This gap in ability was unsurpassable.

Eliard sighed involuntarily. His friend was getting stronger and stronger. Eliard had worked hard, but he was still a Level-3 Magician. Link was getting further and further from him.

Dorias received a considerable amount of reverent gazes as well. He raised his head, puffed out his chest, and rubbed his claws. Over the clattering, he huffed, "These cowards want to cause trouble on my watch? Humph!"

Link didn't have time to be proud. He found Lucy and said, "Calculate the casualties and arrange for pension."

"Yes, Lord."

"Jacker, lock up the Assassins still living. Feed them this and then nail their hands and feet." Link pulled out Sacred Silver.

"I understand."

Then Link said to Dorias, "I'm going out now. The safety of the camp is on you."

Fifty ghouls was a big force. Even in the Skeletal Fort, Link had never seen a group of more than 100 ghouls. He believed that this amount was the maximum number of attackers, so the camp should be safe now. It was time to save Princess Milda.

Dorias was still busy being proud. Hearing Link, he immediately patted his chest.

"Link, don't worry. Give this to me. There won't be any problems!"

He had shown that he was truly powerful. Link could rest easy with Dorias there. He said a few more words to comfort the camp residents and returned to the cabin.

"Master, is he almost awake?" Link asked Grenci. He needed Romulsin's help to find Milda.

"Should be soon. Should I wake him?" Grenci asked.

Link nodded. "Sure."



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